

TESTS

WASHING MACHINES
ESPRESSO MACHINES
MP3 PLAYERS
GRATERS
PAPER SHREDDERS

MARCH 2007
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Save water

Get an efficient showerhead

Do natural first aid treatments work?

Reverse mortgages: traps to watch for



Jane Mackenzie
Editor

Tell us your experiences

CHOICE subscribers have a lot of input into the tests we do and the information we bring you. You do this by filling in surveys for us, doing user trials of products and sending us information on your experiences with various products and services. We then use this information when planning our tests and reports.

For example, a while ago some of you filled in a survey for us about the way you use your washing machine. You told us what's important to you (not surprisingly, still most important is how clean they get your clothes), which features you use and your general washing habits.

One of the most important findings of this survey was that the large majority of you now wash in cold water — and figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that most other Australians also do. So it was time to rethink our testing and switch to washing in cold water too.

You also told us it's important how well a machine rinses out detergent, and we've now included a test for that as well.

We're asking some of you to fill in another survey for us in this issue, telling us how reliable various appliances have been. We have to update this survey every few years because brand reliability changes, new brands appear, and new products come onto the market. Five years ago we weren't asking you how reliable either digital cameras or LCD and plasma TVs were, but they're products everyone wants to know about now.

If you find the CHOICE Appliance Reliability Survey with your magazine, please take the time to fill it in — you'll be providing really valuable information for both yourself and other consumers by doing it.

No advertising, no bias ... just reliable, expert advice.

CHOICE is a non-profit, non-party-political organisation, established in 1959 to provide consumers with information and advice on goods, services, health and personal finances, and to help maintain and enhance your quality of life. It's a Council member of Consumers International.

100% independent. We accept no advertisements, receive no government funding and don't take industry freebies. Our income is solely from the sale of CHOICE and our other publications and services. All the products we put through full testing are bought by us in the marketplace, except occasionally, to get the latest model, we may buy directly from a manufacturer where we can select a random sample. We never accept gifts for testing from manufacturers or retailers, though we sometimes borrow samples, especially of new products, for quick reviews. There are no hidden agendas and our recommendations are completely impartial — we simply road-test products and services so that consumers don't get ripped off.

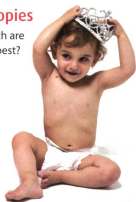
We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a Best Buy. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted.

Representing your interests. We lobby and campaign on behalf of consumers to promote your rights, to influence government policy, and to ensure consumer issues have a high profile in the public arena.

Coming soon ...

Nappies

Which are the best?



Cola

Would you spot your favourite blindfolded?



80 cm LCD TVs

The standard's improving and the price is falling.



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Danger dummies still available

In October 2006 CHOICE Online reported on the introduction of a mandatory consumer product safety standard for babies' dummies. All dummies sold in Australia must meet this standard. So we decided to test the six dummies that failed when we tested them against the voluntary Australian standard (CHOICE, July 2006) to see whether any now pass this new standard. We also tested the new version of the NUK Starlight Silicone Soother, whose earlier version failed our test in 2005.



Dummies tested

- MAM Ulti Mam Orthodontic Soother, Active Innovative Nipple 212.
- NUK Latex Soother 500350.
- NUK Silicone Soother 600252.
- NUK Starlight Silicone Soother 600256.
- PIGEON Silicone Pacifier, Promotes Nasal Breathing, N847.
- TOMMEE TIPPEE

Latex Orthodontic Comforter With Glow Ring and Snap On Hood 403191.

- TOMMEE TIPPEE Super Soft Comforter 433312.

Failures

The NUK Latex Soother, Silicone Soother and Starlight Silicone Soother failed the mandatory standard for the same reason they failed our previous tests. Their shields aren't large enough, meaning they can more easily be taken entirely into a baby's mouth. We've had several such incidents reported to us by concerned parents.

However, the distributor of the NUK dummies insists its products comply with the mandatory standard. Given the results of our tests, we can only disagree.

The TOMMEE TIPPEE Latex Orthodontic Comforter also failed. The ventilation holes in the shields of some samples we tested are too small, just as in the previous test. The manufacturer told us it's investigated this problem since our last report and is satisfied its product meets the standard.

We reported these failures to the ACCC, which said it's considering the issue and will take appropriate action.

Passed the test

Three of the dummies that failed our last test — the MAM Ulti Mam Orthodontic Soother, PIGEON Silicone Pacifier and TOMMEE TIPPEE Super Soft Comforter — passed this test, because the tests they failed last time have been removed from the new mandatory standard.

About standards

There's a difference between a consumer product safety standard and an Australian standard. The former is a mandatory regulation, while the latter is a voluntary set of specifications, created by a committee of experts, that usually includes a range of technical tests. In most cases the consumer product safety standard refers to the relevant Australian standard, but might include only selected important clauses, sometimes modified.

The consumer product safety standard for dummies is based on the Australian standard, AS 2432, but the tests are modified and simplified to bring it more in line with overseas standards. We're working with the ACCC and other government regulators, Standards Australia and industry representatives to review and update AS 2432.

Thumbs down for retail loyalty programs

Recent research has shown shoppers think retail loyalty programs offer little benefit.

Only about one in four participants in a survey agreed the benefits offered by retailers on their loyalty card programs are excellent; one in three disagreed.

More than half of the dissatisfied participants said they have to spend too much to receive a reward, and a quarter said they hadn't received any value from being a member.

The research, commissioned by Fujitsu, surveyed 1000 consumers about their experiences with the loyalty programs offered by retail stores, from the local corner store to fashion outlets.

About half the respondents were members of two or more retail loyalty programs, while 2% had signed up to 10 or more. About one in five had chosen not to enrol in any retailer's loyalty program.

Participants named price discounts, points that never expire and free products as features they'd like to see in retail loyalty programs.

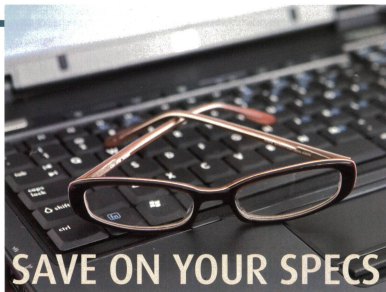
CHOICE verdict Shop around for what you want at the best price — don't let retail loyalty programs influence where you shop.

CORRECTION

BARBECUES

CHOICE, December 2006

In the table that accompanied our article on barbecues (page 38) the warranty for the DOWNUNDER 4 Burner Hooded BBQ with Sideburner G40H was incorrect. It has a one-year warranty, not two years.



If you're looking for a bargain on your next pair of specs you might want to try shopping online.

Websites selling prescription glasses have gained popularity in the US and Europe over the past few years and the first Australian-based glasses website was launched last year. Several more have sprung up since.

The websites offer large discounts on frames and lenses. We compared prices from one website with those of a regular store and found discounts of around 35% on rimless frames and lenses, and up to 75% on standard frames and lenses.

Online dispensers can offer such big discounts as they don't have the same overheads as traditional stores and also don't have to pay to maintain expensive eye-testing equipment. At the moment, not all the Australian sites we found offer multifocal/progressive lenses or designer frames.

What to do

Once you've had an eye test, the optometrist is obliged to give you a copy of your prescription if you ask for it, whether or not you buy anything from them. You'll need to type the details of the script into an online form.

Most sites provide a guide to help you decipher the prescription terms, but if you're still unsure look for a site that allows you to fax the script to them for checking. One online dispenser we spoke to said he was encouraging all his customers to fax their scripts to make sure they hadn't made any mistakes. The dispenser can then ring the optometrist if they have trouble interpreting the handwriting.

You also need to select the size of the glasses that will fit your head comfortably, which may prove difficult without trying them on. The easiest way is to copy the size of an existing pair that fits you comfortably — the measurements should be on one of the arms.

But perhaps the biggest problem with buying online is not being able to try them on and see how they look. On some overseas sites you're able to upload a photo of yourself and 'virtually' try different glasses on, and at least one Australian site is considering a similar feature. Generally, online stores won't let you return glasses if you don't like them. They'll only exchange or refund your purchase if they've made an error or the glasses are faulty.

You can also buy glasses from overseas sites but it's likely to be more difficult to seek redress if something goes wrong.

As always when shopping online it's a good idea to check for contact details on the site and call if you have any concerns.

And if you decide to buy online, make sure you still get regular professional eyecare and only use a current prescription (no more than two years old).

Webcam watch

Webcams are handy for sending pictures to friends or family via the internet and, if they have a built-in microphone, can be used for making phone calls over the internet, instant messaging or even surveillance.

CHOICE Computer recently tested 18 webcams priced \$100 or less. The top performers were:

- CYBERSNIP Scout, \$50.
- MICROSOFT LifeCam VX-3000, \$100.
- CREATIVE WebCam Instant Skype, \$75.

Webcam picture quality is generally not good, however, and few of the cameras tested scored very well for performance.

You may not get better quality for a higher price, but you'll probably get additional features. When choosing a webcam consider:

- The focus range and field of view.
- Whether the webcam comes with a microphone and audio recording.
- How far you can tilt, rotate and pan it.
- Automatic exposure and colour balance.
- An indicator light to let you know when it's recording.

Many webcams come with motion detection software so you can use them to see what's happening while you're away from your computer. Some also include face-tracking software.

The full report is available in the Jan/Feb 2007 issue of CHOICE Computer. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to choice.com.au/magazines.





The little blue pill Xenical appears to be the latest hot thing in weight loss, Hollywood style. It's a 'pharmacist only' drug — available on request at a pharmacy, not one for which you need a prescription — and it's touted by the drug company to be the scientific solution to losing weight. But it can have unpleasant gastro-intestinal side effects, and it's not intended for use by someone who just wants to lose a bit of weight. It's only been through clinical trials that show it's suitable for people who are obese, with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or more, or with a BMI of 27 or more with obesity-related risk factors such as high blood pressure or cholesterol.

Xenical, anyone?

When its recent advertising stint during TV shows, including *Australian Idol*, put Xenical into the mainstream, we were concerned that the audience — with a high proportion of young female viewers — could be left with the impression that the drug was a quick-fix solution suitable for anyone who wants to lose some weight.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia has issued guidelines for pharmacists to follow when dispensing Xenical, which should ensure that only eligible people receive the drug and that they're given suitable advice and counselling. To see if the guidelines are being followed, we sent a researcher out to pharmacies across the Sydney metropolitan area.

Our researcher was a young-looking 19-year-old woman with a BMI of 24.8, who eats healthily and leads a reasonably active lifestyle. We were stunned that she was able to buy Xenical in 24 of the 30 different pharmacies visited. Key findings included:

- Less than one third of the pharmacies

measured or asked for her height and weight. These details are needed to calculate BMI, which should be considered before supplying Xenical.

- Only three of the 24 pharmacies that sold her Xenical calculated her BMI. Two correctly calculated it as about 25, but sold Xenical to her anyway. The third incorrectly calculated her BMI as 27 (using the same height and weight measurements) and sold her the drug.
- No-one asked our researcher her age. The safety and effectiveness of Xenical for people under 18 hasn't been established, so it's not recommended for children or adolescents.
- Eight pharmacies gave no advice about how to use the product, and of the 16 that did the explanations were brief.
- Side effects of Xenical were mentioned in just 16 of the 24 pharmacies where it was sold to our researcher.

For more details of our shadow shop, and our campaign to have Xenical's advertising approval revoked and it made prescription-only, see choice.com.au/health.

SCAMS TARGET YOU: PROTECT YOURSELF

Our email inboxes, mobile phones and mailboxes overflow with fabulous-sounding offers to earn money from home, prize giveaways and cheap deals on goods and services — but how do you tell if they're genuine? Frauds and scams aimed at stealing your money and personal information have become increasingly sophisticated, while technological advances have spawned countless ways to target the unsuspecting.

March is Global Consumer Fraud Protection month. The Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce maintains a website (scamwatch.gov.au) to provide practical strategies on how to protect yourself from being a victim of a scam.

Each week of the month will focus on a different theme, offering consumers

practical steps to protect their money, phone, computer and identity.

Protect your money

- Never respond to an email asking for your PIN or passwords.
- Never send money to someone you don't know or trust.
- Only invest with licensed firms and advisors.

Protect your phone

- Be suspicious of unexpected calls and text messages.
- Hang up, or text 'stop' to unwanted messages.
- Don't give your number to just anyone.

Protect your computer

- Don't respond to dubious emails.

- If in doubt, delete.
- Keep computer protection software up-to-date.

Protect your identity

- Never give out personal information to someone you don't know or trust.
- Don't just bin it — destroy old bills, records and expired cards.
- Check your credit report at least once a year (for how to do it, see choice.com.au and search for 'credit report').

Above all, don't be pressured into making a hasty decision. Research or investigate the company or opportunity — if you can't find out much, it's likely to be a scam. And don't forget the old adage: "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

Strewh, they told the truth!

My nomination for the CHOICE 2006 'Truth in Product Labelling' award goes to TRI PIES — The Orange One (Sweet Potato and Fetta). I bought one today at the local supermarket and checked the cooking instructions, which read: "Conventional oven: Preheat oven to 100°C and bake for 10 mins. Microwave: Don't bother — it goes soggy."

Yes — their words, on the label. Brilliant — at last, an honest manufacturer! It tasted OK too.

Kym Weoward

Withdrawal sting

Recently I made three withdrawals from an ATM while overseas via my account with St George bank. I was shocked to discover that as a result I was charged almost \$14 in fees for each transaction (\$5 plus 2.5%). These withdrawals were standard ATM transactions via the Cirrus network, not credit card cash advances.

This is an exorbitant amount of money considering the marginal costs to the bank of such a transaction are nearly zero. These rapaciously high fees are now being imposed



by other banks as well, which have gone from a high flat fee for ATM withdrawals to a high flat fee and a percentage for the transaction.

Jason Sharman

St George says the cash withdrawal transaction charges reflect the cost and risk involved in providing customers with the convenience of accessing their money overseas. According to St George, banks incur significant costs to allow this, including technology and security in the cards and systems, the electronic links, commission and fee arrangements between the financial institutions involved in the international network, credit scheme charges and the currency movement exposure the bank is subjected to.

St George suggests the costs are comparable to alternative means, but depending on your bank's scale of charges, travellers' cheques or a prepaid travel money card (Cash Passport) may incur fewer charges and therefore be a

cheaper alternative. Check with your bank and compare fees and exchange rates (and see our article on travel money in an upcoming issue).

Fitness blues

My wife wanted to cancel her direct-debit FITNESS FIRST membership, which can't be done via the bank but must be done by informing the business. When she rang FITNESS FIRST she was told she had to attend an interview and explain her reasons. Because she's very busy at work — the reason she wanted to cancel her membership — she didn't want to do this and asked for the form to be faxed to her, which FITNESS FIRST refused to do.

She then asked to speak to someone in authority who could help her. The person was 'not available' and did not return several phone messages left over a couple of days. Exasperated, my wife left a message for the same person using an assumed name and saying she wanted to join FITNESS FIRST instead. The relevant person rang back within the hour. Needless to say the manager was somewhat peeved that she didn't want to join.

Though my wife still had to turn up at the gym, the form was left at the front desk and there was no interview required.

THUMBS UP!

- Graham Rees would like to offer a Thumbs-up to SEIKO. When his 18-month old Pulsar Duo watch stopped ticking, he contacted the company and was invited to send in the watch, even though it was no longer under warranty. SEIKO subsequently returned it, fully repaired, with a further six-month warranty on repairs.
- Karen Wilkinson gives a big Thumbs-up to BABIES GALORE, which promptly sent a replacement set of rear wheel guards for her pram, even though she was unable to provide proof of purchase.

The form was in duplicate, with one copy for the member, so there was no reason why the transaction couldn't have been conducted by fax.

Frank, WA

FITNESS FIRST told us every club has a Customer Care Manager who deals with cancellations (said to be not the same person who joins people up) and their commitment is to call all members back within 48 hours. The company said Frank could email it directly, with the name of the club, and offered to address the delays.

Regarding its refusal to fax out forms, FITNESS FIRST says in the past it's encountered problems where cancellation faxes were never received, and therefore it encourages members to make a time to ensure all paperwork can be signed off by a manager, with a copy for the member. (Of course this meeting is also an opportunity for the club to find out if "we can improve in any area" and to persuade the member to "choose an alternative action") If a meeting's impossible, though, alternative arrangements are made. ■

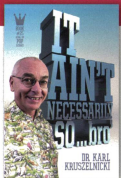
LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to Thumbs up at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, Your Letters awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Kym Weoward, receives *It ain't necessarily so* ...

By, or any other book of her choice from choice.com.au/books.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.





Happy down on the farm...

If you vote with your wallet for free-range farm animals, how can you be sure you get what you're paying for?

IN A NUTSHELL

- Free-range meat is currently short on definitions and standards, but there are a few labels you can look for to get the best guarantee currently available that you're getting what you're paying for.

- The Humane Society International's new Humane Choice label will be worth looking for when it becomes available in mid 2007.

Free-range used to be something just for chickens, but now other free-range meats are appearing on supermarket shelves and in butcher shops.

However, free-range can mean a variety of things — the only common bottom line is that, as for all meat production, the general welfare requirements under state-based animal welfare acts and codes are met. Free-range animals, just by dictionary definition, shouldn't be closely confined and will have some sort of outside access, but it doesn't necessarily guarantee animals an old-MacDonald-like experience of wandering through a farmyard of green grass and shady trees.

From the consumer viewpoint, there are labelling schemes you can look for that give the best guarantee currently available that you're getting what you probably think you're paying for.

Industry-based schemes

Some industry groups have good schemes that certify the meat was produced to certain free-range standards and codes of practice; others just leave it to individual farmers (see the sections on individual meats, pages 9–11). Some of these industry schemes are audited from outside the

particular industry, and others by auditors within the industry but outside the particular farm, but there are no government audits of any meat industry free-range standards.

Animal welfare

The Australian arm of Humane Society International (HSI) recently launched its own Humane Choice labelling scheme (see page 11). It says this was done in response to the many enquiries it receives from the public, asking which meats to buy.

Up to now, HSI has recommended people buy certified organic meat (see page 10). But it says its new standards go further and they're certified by one of the same government-checked schemes that certify organic produce (NASAA — National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia).

Not all animal welfare groups are equally happy to endorse free-range or any other kind of meat. Many argue that the only way to truly protect animals is to become vegetarian or vegan. This isn't something everyone's prepared to embrace, and the pros and cons of various animal-raising systems are beyond the scope of this article, but if you want to find out more, see *For more information*, above right.

For more information

- **Humane Choice** label, the Humane Society International: www.hsi.org.au; phone 1800 333 737.

- **FREPA**, Free Range Egg and Poultry Australia Ltd: www.frepa.com.au; phone 0500 537 372.

- **FREPA**, Free Range Egg and Poultry Association of Australia Inc; phone 07 4696 7545.

Organic certification bodies

Not all are listed here, but these are two of the most common ones.

For more, see **CHOICE**, October 2004:

- **NASAA**, National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia: www.nasaa.com.au; phone 08 8370 8455.

- **BFA**, Biological Farmers of Australia: www.bfa.com.au; phone 07 3350 5716; its logo is 'Australian Certified Organic'.

Some animal welfare bodies

- **RSPCA**: www.rspca.org.au; phone 02 6282 8300.

- **Animal Liberation**: Each state has its own separate animal liberation organisation. Google 'animal liberation' for contact details, or check your White Pages.

- **Animals Australia**: www.animalsaustralia.org; phone 1800 888 584; with Save Babe: www.savebabe.com.

- **Voiceless**: www.voiceless.org.au; phone 02 9357 0723.

Associations of meat producers

- **Australian Chicken Meat Federation Inc**: www.chicken.org.au; phone 02 9929 4077.

- **Australian Pork Limited**: www.apl.com.au; phone 1800 789 099.

- **Meat & Livestock Australia**: www.mla.com.au; phone 1800 023 100.



ACCREDITED
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FREE RANGE EGG AND
POULTRY AUSTRALIA LTD



NASAA
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CERTIFICATION NO XXXX
**AUSTRALIAN
CERTIFIED
ORGANIC**

RSPCA

On the farm, animal by animal

Pigs

Pig farming has become far removed from the 'Babe' model; intensive farming of pigs is now commonplace.

A debate is currently under way about the welfare of non-free-range pigs. The national welfare code for pigs, which forms the basis of state animal welfare requirements, is being reviewed. Both sides of the debate are dissatisfied with the draft proposals. Animal welfare groups, including the RSPCA, are concerned the draft code doesn't go far enough and still allows practices they find unacceptable, such as confining pregnant sows in 'sow stalls' and using farrowing crates for sows about to give birth and until the piglets are weaned (up to three to four weeks later), which further confine their movement.

The industry has supported some of the changes suggested in the new code, such as reducing the length of time sows can stay in sow stalls (from the entire 16 weeks of pregnancy to a maximum of six weeks), and it considers its practices are in the best interests of the animals. However, it also argues that any substantial change to minimum standards needs a very long lead time (15 years, rather than the 10 years proposed) because of the building and other costs involved.

As for a free-range alternative, the industry says, among other things, that much of Australia isn't suitable for free-range pig farming because of climatic extremes and poor soil — pigs are easily sunburnt and can also suffer from heat stress, for example.

While the pork industry has standards that cover pigs raised outdoors, it has none specifically defining free-range pigs, so it's up to individual farmers to decide exactly what they mean by it within the general welfare requirements set down in the National Model Code for the welfare of pigs. As there's no independent checking of individual free-range farmers, it comes down to trust in individual farms and brands.

The RSPCA recently extended its endorsement program to cover pig farming and you'll now see some brands of pork — such as OTWAY — carrying the RSPCA logo. This means the brand conforms with the RSPCA's standards and sends monthly reports to the RSPCA as well as receiving six-monthly RSPCA inspections. The RSPCA pig standards ban the use of farrowing crates and sow stalls, and while the sows have outdoor access the piglets, once weaned, don't join their parents outdoors — they're kept in open straw-based huts, which are open to the air at the sides, but which don't allow the pigs to go outside. >



AUSTRALIAN PRESS

HOW MUCH?

A CHOICE snapshot of prices in Sydney supermarkets suggests buying accredited free-range poultry costs a few dollars per kilo more — about 20% extra. Certified organic meat can cost as much as twice the price of the conventional alternative.

Organic meat

In addition to the things you might automatically associate with organic agriculture — like no pesticide use — it also has a focus on providing a natural environment for animals and fostering natural behaviours. Certified organic meat production also includes a free-range aspect.

Although there has been much debate in the media in recent times regarding problems within the organic certification system, CHOICE still considers certified organics as currently being the best guarantee that organic produce has been produced appropriately.

The organic industry is currently in effect regulated by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), because exported organic foods must meet AQIS's National Standard for Organic and Bio-dynamic Produce, and it has accredited a number of organisations as qualified to certify organic foods. The government does this to ensure Australia's organic export markets, but Australian consumers benefit indirectly.

Recent debates about how much flexibility is permitted in the standards, and whether food that can't be exported should be allowed for domestic consumption in certain circumstances, serve to highlight the urgent need for developing an agreed domestic standard and enforcement framework for organic produce sold to Australian consumers. And CHOICE will be working on making this happen. In the meantime, certified organic produce (see CHOICE, October 2004, for details) is the best guarantee currently available.

> A product you might spot among supermarket smallgoods is the KR Bred Free-Range prepackaged ham and bacon. It follows a 'bred-free-range' system along the same lines as that described above for RSPCA pork. The KR farms are checked by an auditor independent from the farm, but associated with the pork industry.

Cows and sheep

For many years, beef and lamb in Australia were all 'free-range'. No matter how big the operation, the animals roamed free, grazing on the wide open spaces Australia has to offer.

Beef and sheep feedlots are now becoming more common, and the drought is speeding things in this direction as grazing land in many areas is drought-affected, making feedlots more attractive.

The feedlot industry considers animals in its care are protected, fed and cared for if they're sick. Critics say the animals have very limited space and the environment they live in is dirty, dusty and contaminated by excrement. The RSPCA doesn't oppose feedlots as such, but has many concerns and a list of conditions it considers must be met to ensure good animal welfare. There's no RSPCA-endorsed beef or lamb scheme at present.

Critics of the cattle industry say some traditionally reared cattle and sheep don't fare much better — while some may live on rich grazing land where farms are small enough for all the animals to receive individual care and attention, other farms are so large they say animals are left to their own devices until round-up time.

Certified organic meats have a free-range component, but the standards don't go as far as some animal welfare groups would like, with some contentious procedures such as mulesing (cutting away skin near the tail of a sheep) and tail docking still allowed under some circumstances. HSI's Humane Choice scheme prohibits these practices, and until this label hits the shops your 'free-range' beef and lamb guarantees are limited to certified organics.

Chickens

It's a misconception that meat chickens are kept in small battery cages — that's solely the fate of intensively reared egg-producing chickens. Most regular meat chickens are barn-raised, although animal welfare proponents aren't happy with: the amount of space the chickens are allowed; health problems they say are a result of selective breeding for rapid growth of the chickens; and other practices like debeaking.

The main group accrediting free-range poultry meat is Free Range Egg and Poultry Australia (FREPA). There are other industry accreditation bodies, for example the similarly named Free Range Egg and Poultry Association of Australia (FREPA), but they focus mainly on eggs, and cover fewer chickens for meat production. FREPA's standards go further than general government welfare requirements and include things such as clearly specifying the quality of the outside environment — it

must have vegetation and be able to keep producing it, in addition to shade and shelter.

FREPA told us it regularly audits its members' farms, using auditors not otherwise involved with the poultry industry to increase independence, but there's no government supervision of the scheme's auditing. FREPA, on the other hand, told us it audits its members using expert poultry auditors, as it feels the expertise in poultry is critical. Either way, buying accredited free-range chicken provides a greater degree of happy-chicken-certainty than buying a non-accredited product.

Corn-fed chickens aren't free-range unless this is also specifically stated on the label. Corn-fed simply means that the chicken receives a different diet high in corn, which gives the meat a distinctive colour and flavour.

Certified organic chicken standards also encompass a free-range aspect, and Humane Choice is planning to have its endorsed free-range chicken on the market in the near future.

Supermarket meat

In addition to specific branded products, both the big supermarkets have their own-brand free-range and organic meats.

- Coles has YOU'LL LOVE COLES Free Range chicken, accredited by FREPA, and YOU'LL LOVE COLES Organic beef and sausages, certified by Safe Food Queensland (SFO).
- Woolworths has WOOLWORTHS Organic (beef, lamb, pork and poultry), which it says are certified by one of the national accreditation bodies. WOOLWORTHS Free Range poultry is accredited by FREPA. ■

Humane Choice scheme

This new labelling scheme is about to hit supermarkets, hopefully by mid 2007. It was developed by the Australian arm of the Humane Society International (HSI) in response to people asking them which meat was the best to buy in terms of animal welfare, and because of the lack of clarity around free-range labels and the lack of national free-range standards.

HSI says it previously recommended people buy certified organic produce, but its own standards go further in ensuring that farm animals have the best life and most humane death possible.

For example, Humane Choice bans some contentious practices that HSI thinks organic standards overlook, such as mulesing sheep in some circumstances and nose-ringing pigs (which prevents them from rooting in the earth — a natural pig behaviour). It also has much stronger requirements for how animals are transported to slaughter, how long this can take and how long they can spend without water, for example.

According to HSI the Humane Choice label is designed to give consumers confidence that farm animals have the best life an animal should have.

Farms using the Humane Choice labelling are audited to HSI standards by the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia (NASAA) — an organic certification body that has been accredited by the Federal Government (AQIS) to certify organic agriculture.

Humane Choice is aiming to have its labelled products in supermarkets by mid 2007 — beef, chicken, eggs and some dairy products such as butter and yoghurt should be first off the rank, with lamb and pork to come later. Eventually it's hoped the labelling scheme will also apply to many other products, such as milk, wool and leather.



Our shadow shop revealed poor advice and information from reverse mortgage sellers.

Trading your home for a holiday

IN A NUTSHELL

• We sent three shadow shoppers to mortgage brokers and reverse mortgage providers and found a poor standard of product information and advice — it's inadequate and needs regulation in order to improve.

• We'll bring you a comprehensive assessment of available reverse mortgage loans in our next issue.

Wouldn't it be nice asking for a \$60,000 loan and being offered \$300,000 instead? That's exactly what happened to CHOICE shadow shopper Anthony when he asked a broker for information on a reverse mortgage.

Reverse mortgages are aimed at home owners aged 60 and over. You can use them, for example, to supplement your income with a monthly payment, buy a new car or to pay for a holiday. Essentially you borrow money against the value of your property, but make no regular repayments. The loan is repaid when you move, sell or after your death — and in the meantime, of course, it accumulates compounding interest.

We sent three shadow shoppers to mortgage brokers and reverse mortgage providers. We found the majority of brokers and salespeople:

- Encouraged borrowers to take the maximum possible loan instead of the requested amount. The more you borrow, the faster the debt grows and the less you or your estate will receive when the house is finally sold; see *How much does the loan grow?*, above right.
- Didn't give consumers all the information they need to make an informed decision. See *Higher standards of product information needed*, page 14.

And we've heard of some mortgage brokers offering very risky 'asset loans' to people enquiring about a reverse mortgage, which can put them in danger of losing their home. There's more on this in *Unscrupulous brokers*, page 14.

How do they work?

Reverse mortgages are secured against your home. The title stays in your name and you're responsible for all ongoing costs such as rates and maintenance.

The impact of fees and interest means the loan grows over time. What's left after it's repaid depends on factors such as how much your house increases in value, the interest rate and the amount you borrowed.

The following are some of the features and traps to look out for:

- The most important protection normally offered is the 'no negative equity guarantee'. What this means is that you can never owe more than the sale proceeds of the property, even if its sale price doesn't in reality cover the debt. It's a vital element of protection for people taking out a reverse mortgage.
- How much you can borrow depends on your age and the value of the property. At age 60 you can usually get up to 15% of the value, at 80 up to about 35%.

All names in this article have been changed.

How much does the loan grow?

We've calculated two examples: the first is John and Jill, the second Peter and Pam. Both have houses worth \$500,000 and take out a reverse mortgage for \$100,000.

- John and Jill pay 8% interest and their property value increases by 6% per year.
- Peter and Pam pay 10% interest and their property value increases by only 2% per year.

The two examples show that if you're lucky enough to keep paying a relatively low interest rate and

enjoy a high increase in property value, you'll retain considerable equity in your home.

However, if the increase in value is only low and your interest rate is high or goes up even slightly, the value of your estate steadily diminishes.

Peter and Pam's situation isn't a worst-case scenario. You could get into negative territory faster if interest rates went higher than 10% and property values went down instead of increasing.

Scenario		Today	In 10 years	In 20 years	In 25 years
John and Jill					
Loan amount (\$)	Loan + 8% interest	100,000	226,927	507,305	759,598
Property value (\$)	6% property value increase per year	500,000	895,424	1,603,568	2,145,935
Value of estate (\$)	Property value after loan is repaid	400,000	668,497	1,096,263	1,388,337
Peter and Pam					
Loan amount (\$)	Loan + 10% interest	100,000	276,899	755,014	1,245,408
Property value (\$)	2% property value increase per year	500,000	609,497	742,974	820,303
Value of estate (\$)	Property value after loan is repaid	400,000	332,598	-12,040 (A)	-425,105 (A)

Note: Loan is taken as a lump sum. We used an \$850 setup fee, \$10 monthly fees and \$200 valuation fee every five years. The scenario doesn't take selling costs into account.

(A) The lender would usually cover the loss, but see Traps in the fine print, below.

• You can receive a lump sum, regular amounts (such as monthly), a combination of both or use a flexible drawdown. Not all lenders offer all options.

Trap Fees can apply to drawdowns, and lenders may stop regular payments if the value of your property diminishes.

• Interest rates currently range between 8.1% and 9.1% pa for variable and fixed-rate loans. (For comparison, standard home loan rates are currently around 7.5% to 8%.) Fixed loans are usually available for terms of between one year and your lifetime.

Trap You may have to pay expensive 'break' fees if you repay the loan before the end of a fixed-rate period.

• A range of fees can apply, including setup and annual fees. You also have to pay for regular property valuations (normally every three to five years).

Traps in the fine print

Many reverse mortgage contracts contain clauses that limit your rights. CHOICE is very concerned about wide default clauses: with some contracts you can get into default for relatively minor issues like overlooking some paperwork or not punctually paying your rates. Once you're in default, the lender has the right to ask you for immediate repayment of the loan and can start enforcement action to sell your home.

The shadow shop

Originally reverse mortgages were sold directly by the lender, but in the last few years mortgage brokers have started to offer these products. Currently only very few loans are sold by licensed financial advisers.

We sent three shadow shoppers, aged 65, to a total of 10 mortgage brokers and five companies offering reverse mortgages.

Each is married and the sole owner of their home. All are retired: one receives a Centrelink pension, the other two a pension for Commonwealth employees. They live in Sydney with houses valued between \$600,000 and \$1.5 million. They asked for a \$60,000 loan to buy a new car and go on a holiday.

We then assessed the quality of product information received during a personal consultation, usually a visit.

All companies now offer a no negative equity guarantee, but most contracts say they may not honour it if you're in default at the time of the sale.

At the time of writing many companies were in the process of making changes to their contracts. We'll bring you a comprehensive assessment of the different loans in our next issue. >

< Higher standards of product information needed

Reverse mortgages are very complex and relatively new products with which consumers have little experience. We think these products should only be sold to well-informed people who are aware of the pitfalls and have considered them carefully.

This is where the professional who sells the product to the borrower has an important role.

Most lenders will try to ensure you're aware of important conditions before settlement: most require you to have expert independent legal advice, some also require financial advice and some may contact you directly to make sure you understand the loan contract.

However, comprehensive information is needed right from the first meeting. You should be able to expect to be fully informed *before* you formally apply for a loan.

While our mystery shop was small (three people visited or called a total of 15 mortgage brokers and lenders), it still showed glaring gaps in the information provided to consumers. The majority of mortgage brokers and salespeople:

- Didn't talk to the consumer about alternatives such as buying a smaller home.
- Recommended borrowing a larger sum than needed.

Brokers usually receive an upfront and/or ongoing commission on the amount you borrow. This leads to a potential conflict of interest, as it's in the broker's interest for you to borrow more.

- While most gave the shadow shoppers a graph or tools to calculate how much the loan would grow, some only gave one scenario or didn't explain assumptions.
- Didn't talk about future needs such as long-term age care.
- While a majority mentioned the no negative equity guarantee, none explained that there are situations in which it wouldn't apply, and a large majority didn't explain that there are situations when the loan could be in default, thus voiding the guarantee.
- Didn't mention requirements like maintenance, rates and building insurance.
- Dealt well with the fact that our shadow shoppers were each the sole owner of the house, with some recommending their wife should be included on the title deeds before taking out the reverse mortgage. However, some didn't raise the issue. One broker even showed a serious gap in product knowledge by recommending a reverse mortgage that isn't available in this situation — the lender requires all residents to be owners.

Unscrupulous brokers

A few years back, Jane and Peter from Sydney had difficulty keeping up the repayments on their \$190,000 home loan and went to a mortgage broker, asking for a reverse mortgage. The broker recommended they take out a larger loan to pay off their original one. He told them they wouldn't have to make monthly interest payments on the new loan.

Jane and Peter thought they'd been offered a reverse mortgage. In fact it was a loan secured by their house that didn't require documentation proving their ability to repay it — this is sometimes called asset lending. The difference from a reverse mortgage is that you're required to repay the asset loan (including accumulated interest) at some stage, and not just when you sell your home, die or move out. These loans are usually structured in a way that provides you with enough funds to repay existing debts.

However, with repayments built in and added to the loan amount, the loan will eventually grow and you may not have the money to pay it out when it's finally required. Brokers may suggest people who take out one of these loans can again refinance at this point, but that strategy can only work if the value of the home has increased sufficiently — it's very high-risk.

After taking out the recommended loan and using money for renovations and repayments, Jane and Peter



now owe \$350,000 and are in danger of losing their house.

Two mortgage brokers offered such a loan to CHOICE shadow shopper Larry as an alternative to a reverse mortgage. Larry is on a Centrelink pension. One broker suggested he could borrow up to 70% (\$420,000) of the value of his home and use the money for investing.

CHOICE is very concerned about this practice. Asset loans are in no way similar to a reverse mortgage as they require repayment and don't have a no negative equity guarantee. They put borrowers in danger of eventually losing their home. Recommending such a product to borrowers who are in financial difficulty and can't afford repayments can only be called unscrupulous.

We've asked the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) to investigate.

On the plus side:

- Many recommended borrowers talk to their children and contact Centrelink.
- Loan features like the interest rate and payment options were usually explained well.
- The brokers and salespeople also provided our shadow shoppers with material ranging from product factsheets to comprehensive brochures with general and specific product information.

The verdict

Reverse mortgages can only work to your advantage if you fully understand them, are aware of contract traps and consider your specific circumstances and future needs.

However, our shadow shop showed there's a danger of coming across mortgage brokers and salespeople who don't give you all the information you need to make an informed decision. CHOICE wants the mortgage broker legislation that's currently being drafted — and which will mean mortgage brokers must have a licence and an external dispute resolution scheme — also to include a test for appropriate standards of advice on reverse mortgages. This is crucial to stop the mis-selling of these products. ■

Bizarre sales practices

When CHOICE shadow shopper Anthony called the COMMONWEALTH BANK (CBA) for information about reverse mortgages he encountered somewhat bizarre sales practices.

A pre-approval interview was conducted over the phone. During this phone call the salesperson said they needed to open an account for Anthony to get to the next screen on their computer. They explained very few details about the product but offered to answer specific questions and to send information.

Although the information never arrived, Anthony did receive a transaction account statement and a call from a valuer. He told the valuer he wasn't interested and asked for the account to be closed. But a few weeks later he received another statement, this time for a line of credit account.

The CBA confirmed its staff did make mistakes in handling our shadow shopper's enquiry and said it's taking steps to reinforce correct procedures.



GENE ROSS

Checklist

A reverse mortgage is a long-term commitment you usually keep for the rest of your life.

For many people their home is their most valuable asset. If you take out a reverse mortgage you limit your options in the future: you affect the funds available for future needs such as expensive healthcare or a move into a retirement village.

Reverse mortgages can work to your advantage. But it's crucial you're aware of all the pitfalls and have considered them carefully:

- Is a reverse mortgage the best option? Consider alternatives: could you buy a smaller home instead or could your children help out?
- How much money do you need? Make an expenditure budget. The debt will grow faster the more you borrow. Beware if the broker or salesperson recommends applying for a larger loan than you really need — will you be able to resist the temptation to use it?
- How much will the loan grow? Do calculations using a range of loan amounts, interest rates and changes in house value, and take your life expectancy into account to consider possible outcomes. Get independent financial advice if you're not confident of doing this yourself.
- Consider your possible future needs. What if you need long-term aged care or want to move to a retirement village: would you still have enough money left to do so?
- If you're the sole owner of the home, are there other permanent residents such as your spouse or a relative? Can they stay there if you die or need to move into aged care?
- Contact Centrelink and make sure your pension isn't adversely affected.
- Talk to your family and anyone provided for in your estate.
- Loan features: Is this the best reverse mortgage for you? Do you want regular payments, flexible drawdowns or a lump sum? Do you want the security of a fixed rate? Check fees and interest rates and compare products.

Check the contract

- What are the requirements of the loan? Usually your home needs to be debt-free, so you need to repay any outstanding loans first. You also need funds to maintain the property, pay rates and building insurance.
- Can the lender require you to vacate the property under any circumstances, for example if you're in default? Under what conditions would you be in default and what happens in that case?
- Check the no negative equity guarantee carefully with your legal adviser. Are there any conditions attached (such as not being in default of the contract)?
- Make sure the lender and anyone you're dealing with (such as a mortgage broker and a company managing the mortgage) are all members of an approved dispute resolution scheme. To check phone ASIC on 1300 780 808.

IN A NUTSHELL

• There's plenty of anecdotal evidence from years of traditional use, but scientific evidence for the clinical effectiveness of natural first-aid remedies is generally lacking.

Nature to the rescue?

Just how effective are natural first-aid remedies?

When you burn yourself on the barbecue, do you reach for aloe vera gel to soothe your skin? When you're attacked by mozzies, do you dab the bites with tea tree oil to stop them getting infected? Or when your child falls and grazes their knee, do you slather the wound with calendula ointment to help it heal? If you do, you're not alone. Most of the world relies mainly on natural medicines, and their popularity is growing again in the west — more than 50% of Australians use some form of complementary medicine. You can easily find natural first-aid remedies in pharmacies and healthfood shops. But can you be sure that they'll work?

Claims for natural remedies' use as first-aid treatments are more often than not based on traditional use, and often aren't backed up by evidence from clinical trials (where patients are methodically treated and observed in a clinical setting). This doesn't necessarily mean they won't work: often no clinical trials have been carried out due to lack of funding. Generally speaking, the lack of large, good-quality clinical trials explains why natural remedies are unlikely to be used as first-aid treatments in a conventional medical setting.

Laboratory and animal studies have demonstrated beneficial effects of a number of the remedies in this report, although that doesn't necessarily mean they'll work for people in real-life situations. Observational studies or case reports describing a remedy's effects are also often plentiful, but more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recently committed \$5 million to complementary medicines research. This should help fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge about the efficacy and safety of commonly used medicinal herbs.

Commission E

An exception to the lack of scientific study of natural remedies is Commission E, a German government regulatory agency composed of scientists, pharmacists, toxicologists, physicians and herbalists that has produced a series of documents known as herbal monographs — essentially formal reviews of medicinal herbs based on the available scientific evidence as well as evidence from traditional use, case studies and the experience of modern herbalists.

The monographs are considered to provide authoritative information, including approved uses of the herbs and their side effects, interactions and doses. Not all the natural remedies discussed in this article have been reviewed by Commission E. But where applicable we've noted when any have been approved by Commission E for first aid-type uses.

Natural first aid in practice

If you're keen to keep natural remedies in your first-aid kit at home, the table, page 19, gives some commonly available options and the first-aid problems it's claimed they're able to treat. We searched the medical literature for clinical evidence for each remedy's specific first-aid uses, and we've summarised the results of our search below. The products listed are examples we found in pharmacies, and all claim to have one or more first-aid uses, as shown in the table.

Natural or not, it's important to use remedies safely, so we've pointed out potential side effects along with tips or cautions for their use. Importantly, the focus here is on minor first aid. If an injury is serious in any way, seek medical attention.

As a general rule, natural remedies, like any medication, should be stored out of reach of children. The ones we've reviewed are for external use only, although some, like pure lavender and tea tree oils, shouldn't be used neat on babies. And some, again including pure tea tree oil, are toxic if swallowed, so if this happens contact a Poisons Information Centre (131 126) or a doctor immediately.

Aloe vera gel

History The gel from the leaf of the cactus-like aloe vera plant (*Aloe barbadensis*) has been used for centuries by many cultures as a topical treatment for various skin conditions, including wounds and burns.

How is it thought to act? By assisting in wound healing, reducing swelling and protecting against infections.

Any clinical evidence? Controlled clinical studies of aloe vera on human wounds and burns show mixed results. One study of patients having dermabrasion for their acne — a surgical process where the skin surface is scraped off — found that the wounds of those treated with aloe vera gel healed faster than the controls. Another study found that aloe gel *delayed* the healing of wounds resulting from gynaecological surgery. For treating burns, aloe vera gel was found to be more effective than Vaseline gauze in one

study, but in another comparing aloe vera with a conventional burn treatment, the results were inconclusive. A recent trial concluded that aloe vera cream (containing 70% aloe vera) was no better than a placebo for treating sunburn.

Cautions Aloe gel is generally safe and non-toxic, although some allergic reactions have been described. Tests on some commercial aloe gel products found that processing can decrease the amount of the active ingredients in the fresh gel. The International Aloe Science Council (IASC) provides a seal of certification for products that have followed proper processing procedures.

Verdict The evidence is mixed, but it probably can't hurt to try maximal-strength (closest to 100%) certified aloe vera gel (or aloe vera juice squeezed directly from the plant, if you have one) on minor wounds and burns/sunburn — and it might work.

Aloe product examples

- CHEM-CARE Aloe Vera Pure.
- FRUIT OF THE EARTH Aloe Vera Gel.*
- SOLARCAINE Aloe Vera Gel.
- SUNSPIRIT Nettle and Aloes Herbal Ointment.
- THURSDAY PLANTATION Aloe Vera Gel.*

*Certified by IASC

Arnica

History *Arnica montana* is a medicinal herb with a long history of use for treating swelling and bruising resulting from blows, and injuries such as sprains. Arnica flower is commonly available in both herbal and homeopathic preparations.

How is it thought to act? By reducing swelling and relieving pain.

Any clinical evidence? Several studies involving patients with poor blood circulation and swelling in the legs found that treatment with herbal arnica produced significant improvement. In a study on osteoarthritic knee pain, herbal arnica gel successfully reduced pain >





< and stiffness. Commission E approved herbal arnica for external use in injury and for consequences of accidents — bruising, swelling and joint problems, for example.

Evidence for the effectiveness of homeopathic arnica (a significantly diluted extract of arnica) remains equivocal. A systematic review of placebo-controlled clinical trials for homeopathic arnica (eight in total, most relating to conditions associated with tissue trauma) found that most studies had severe methodological flaws. It concluded that, on balance, homeopathic arnica is no more effective than a placebo. Results from trials subsequent to this review have been mixed.

Cautions Some people may be sensitive to herbal arnica and can develop contact dermatitis from its use. It shouldn't be applied to broken skin.

Verdict Clinical evidence for arnica as an effective first-aid treatment is lacking, but given Commission E's decision you might want to give it a go on bruises. People with osteoarthritis might also want to try it for pain relief.

Arnica product examples

- BOIRON Arnica Gel.
- BRAUER Arnica Cream (homeopathic).
- GREENRIDGE Arnica ointment.
- SUNSPIRIT Arnica Herbal ointment.
- Various arnica oils.

Calendula

History *Calendula officinalis*, or marigold, is a member of the daisy family (Asteraceae/Compositae). Its preparations have been used since ancient times to treat inflammatory skin conditions and accelerate wound healing.

How is it thought to act? By promoting wound healing, reducing inflammation and protecting against infections.

Any clinical evidence? A study of 156 burn patients compared the effects of three different topical ointments (calendula, Vaseline and another) and observed a marginally significant difference (in promoting successful skin grafting or spontaneous healing of burns) in favour of calendula-containing ointment over Vaseline. Another study found that caesarean section wounds treated with a mixture of calendula and hypericum oils healed better than the control group. Commission E approved the external use of calendula for poorly healing wounds.

Cautions Allergic reactions to calendula have been reported, but these are rare. If you're sensitive or allergic to foods or plants from the daisy family (lettuce, artichokes and marigolds are examples), and it's not being used for immediate first aid, you could do a patch test on some skin first.

Verdict Research on humans is limited, but it might be worth a try on minor burns/sunburn and small wounds.

Calendula product examples

- BOIRON Calendula Gel.
- GREENRIDGE Calendula ointment.
- SUNSPIRIT Calendula Herbal ointment.
- Various calendula oils.



First aid problem	Possible natural remedy*	First aid tip
Insect bites and stings	Lavender, tea tree oil	For a bee sting, remove the barb quickly by scraping it sideways with a fingernail or the side of a sharp object. Don't pull or squeeze the barb as this can cause more venom to be injected into the skin. Symptoms including major swelling and redness or breathing difficulty may indicate an allergic reaction, for which medical attention should be sought.
Bruises and sprains	Arnica	Resting, elevating and initially applying a cold compress to the injury may help the symptoms. Always seek medical advice if there's severe bruising or swelling as this could mean internal bleeding or a broken bone.
Superficial cuts, grazes and other minor wounds	Aloe vera, calendula, honey, hypericum, pawpaw, tea tree oil	Clean the wound thoroughly and cover it with a non-fluffy, non-stick dressing to help prevent infection. If the wound is larger than 2.5 cm, deep, won't stop bleeding or contains debris that can't be removed, seek medical help.
Minor scalds and burns (including sunburn)	Aloe vera, calendula, honey, hypericum, lavender, pawpaw	Cool the burn by holding it under cold water or applying cold compresses, but don't apply ice directly to the skin. Seek medical help if it blisters and is bigger than your palm, or becomes more painful or infected.

* According to product recommendations.

Honey

History Honey has been used since ancient times as a healing agent for wounds.

How is it thought to act? By preventing infections, debriding (lifting waste from) wounds and enhancing wound healing.

Any clinical evidence? The beneficial effect of honey on wound healing has been well documented in medical literature, mainly in the form of case studies or observational reports. A systematic review in 2001 of randomised controlled trials found that the quality of studies was low. Since then the body of evidence has grown, as have reviews of the literature. All these reviews report that therapeutic honey appears to be a useful treatment for wounds and burns, and that it's capable of clearing infection from the wound and helping it to heal. But several of the reviews recommend further good-quality clinical studies be carried out before its widespread use can be supported.

Cautions Honey shouldn't be used on people with a known reaction to bee products and/or pollen. And don't just open the jar in your kitchen cupboard — it's important that honey for use on wounds is sterile and from a reputable source. The type of plant species involved in the honey production is significant, as some have greater antibacterial properties than others. For this reason some honeys have been approved for marketing as therapeutic honeys (Medihoney and Active Manuka honey). Look for products with standardised levels of antibacterial activity (in the case of Manuka honey, a 'Unique Manuka Factor' or UMF+10 or above is recommended for wound care).

Verdict It might be worth trying an approved therapeutic honey product on minor wounds and burns.

Honey product examples

- MEDIHONEY Antibacterial Wound Gel.
- MEDIHONEY Antibacterial Honey Barrier.
- COMVITA Woundcare 18+ Active Manuka Honey.

Hypericum/St John's wort

History *Hypericum perforatum* (more commonly known as St John's wort) has been used for centuries as a medicinal herb, predominantly for treating depression and anxiety, but also for treating wounds.

How is it thought to act? By reducing swelling, protecting against infections and relieving pain.

Any clinical evidence? In contrast to the high number of studies devoted to the anti-depressive effects of St John's wort, very little clinical evidence is available for its other uses. One study found it to be a successful treatment for atopic dermatitis (the most common form of eczema), and another found that a hypericum and calendula mixture helped with caesarean section wound healing. Commission E, however, has approved the external use of oily preparations of St John's wort for treatment of first-degree burns. (First-degree burns only affect the outer layer of skin, causing pain, redness and swelling.)

Cautions Infrequent allergic skin reactions have been reported.

Verdict Clinical evidence for the effectiveness of St John's wort in treating wounds is minimal, although you could try it out on minor burns/sunburn.

Hypericum product example

- SUNSPIRIT Hypericum Herbal Ointment.

Lavender oil

History Oil from the lavender flower (*Lavandula angustifolia*) has been used as an antiseptic in >





< medicine since ancient Arabian, Greek and Roman times and as a topical agent for burns and insect bites.

How is it thought to act? By protecting against infection, preventing allergic reactions and relieving pain.

Any clinical evidence? A large clinical trial found that lavender oil added to bath water helped relieve pain and discomfort in women following childbirth. Lab and animal studies and anecdotal evidence suggest it may be useful for preventing or treating minor skin infections and preventing allergic reactions related to insect bites.

Cautions It's generally thought to be safe, though some people are sensitive to it. If it's not being used for immediate first aid you could do a patch test on some skin first.

Verdict Clinical evidence for its first-aid uses is lacking, though sprinkling lavender oil in your bathwater to help you relax is likely to be safe enough.

Examples of products that contain lavender

- SUNSPIRIT Hypericum Herbal Ointment.
- SUNSPIRIT Nettle and Aloes Ointment.
- Various lavender oils.

Papaya

History Papaya — pawpaw, as it's often called — is the fruit of the papaya tree, *Carica papaya*. The mashed fruit plays a significant role in traditional African medicine for treating burns and wound healing. It's commonly used for treating nappy rash.

How is it thought to act? By debriding (lifting waste from) wounds, accelerating wound healing and preventing infections.

Any clinical evidence? Clinical observations and case studies make up the bulk of the evidence published in medical literature. Its use as an effective treatment for burn wounds and chronic ulcers has been described, but good-quality trials are lacking.

Cautions None documented.

Verdict Needs more research.

Papaya product example

- LUCAS' Papaw Ointment.

Tea tree oil

History Australian Aborigines have used the leaves of the *Melaleuca alternifolia* plant for medicinal purposes for many centuries. Tea tree oil's traditional use is as an antiseptic for preventing and treating minor skin infections.

How is it thought to act? By protecting against infection.

Any clinical evidence? Human studies have focused on its use for treating fungal infections (including tinea and toenail infections), acne and vaginal infections. In one trial, tea tree oil cream improved the symptoms of tinea (including inflammation and itching) compared with a placebo. Two trials investigating the toenail fungal infection onychomycosis both found tea tree oil to be an effective treatment. Another study experimentally induced inflammation on volunteers using histamine (to mimic the body's immune response to an insect bite) and found that tea tree oil significantly reduced swelling. Systematic reviews of tea tree oil and its effects all conclude that evidence is promising, but suggest that more investigation in rigorous clinical trials is needed.

Cautions It can cause skin reactions (irritation and allergic contact dermatitis, for example) in some people. If you have sensitive skin or a history of allergy to plants that are members of the myrtle family (to which the tea tree plant belongs) it's probably best to avoid it.

Verdict The evidence so far is encouraging, though not definitive. As a first-aid treatment it may be worth a try on insect bites and minor skin infections.

Tea tree oil product examples

- GOANNA Tea Tree Oil.
- SUNSPIRIT Tea Tree Herbal Ointment.
- THURSDAY PLANTATION Tea Tree Antiseptic Cream.
- THURSDAY PLANTATION Antiseptic Tea Tree Ointment.
- Various tea tree oils (100% pure). ■





FLAB-FREE CHAMPAGNE, SWEETIE?

Champers with no sugar (called zero dosage) may be the latest thing on the party circuit, but would-be models and party people wishing to maintain their svelte figures had better not celebrate too quickly — nor with too much bubbly.

Not adding sugar during the last stages of making a champagne may sound good for your hips, but as most champers has around 12–13 grams of sugar added per litre, leaving it out only saves you about 2.5 grams, or about 40 kilojoules, per 200 mL glass. And compared to the energy you get from the alcohol — around 700 kilojoules per glass — the no-sugar saving is a drop in the ocean.

So by all means drink new AYALA Zero Dosage, perhaps for the much lauded fruit that's said to shine through, but don't put too much faith in it as a slimming aid.

Practice safe sprouts

Sprouts such as alfalfa, mung and clover are becoming more popular — at least with cafes, which seem to scatter them over just about any dish ordered — and they do make an attractive-looking garnish. But they can also pose a serious safety risk — the number of cases of food poisoning and illness traced back to sprouts is growing, and there have been several recent recalls of sprouts because of bacterial contamination with bugs like *E. coli* and salmonella.

As a result, some people are being advised never to eat raw or even lightly cooked sprouts. In particular young children, elderly people, those with diabetes, pregnant women and people with cancer or a weakened immune system should avoid them altogether.

Anyone else who enjoys eating sprouts is being given a safe-sprout message: buy sprouts that have been stored in a fridge and put them straight into the fridge at home. For more tips on eating sprouts safely, you can download a factsheet from the NSW Food Authority website at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au (search for 'sprouts').



Trans fat now a New York no-no

In December the New York Board of Health voted to ban all unhealthy trans fats from restaurants — the ban will be introduced over the next 18 months. Swapping trans-laden frying and spreading oils (as opposed to the fats used in baking, etc) to healthier versions has a much shorter timeframe — they're to be gone in the next six months.

The ban covers all New York restaurants, including fast-food outlets and mobile vendors. Heart disease is New York's leading cause of death and artery-clogging trans fats are part of the problem. New Yorkers will be eating more healthily thanks to the new ban — now if they can just find a way to make American doughnuts, pizzas, cookies, pies, fries, tacos and burgers low-fat, low-energy and low-salt ...



Modern design and equipment can make even small cars very safe.

Size doesn't matter

IN A NUTSHELL

- Well-designed small cars such as the Citroën C4, Fiat Punto and Toyota Yaris can provide a crash safety standard that was until recently the domain of luxury cars.
- In Australia, side and head airbags are often only available in the luxury version of a model, or as part of option packages together with other equipment. CHOICE wants to see car manufacturers make them readily available across their entire range.

The Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) has released more high-speed crash test results for a number of popular cars in various categories. The tests were carried out in Australia and Europe.

We've added to the table a number of other models crashed recently to give you a fuller picture of how the latest results compare.

Small but safe

With the right design and safety equipment, even small cars can achieve a very good crash test rating, as demonstrated by the CITROËN C4 (which scored 93%), FIAT Punto (90%) and TOYOTA Yaris. The 1.3 L Yaris with front airbags scored a respectable 80%, while a previously tested European 1 L model with safety pack (a \$750 option on Australian models, including side, head and driver's knee airbags) even scored 94% — a result that until fairly recently was only achieved by luxury cars: the MERCEDES BENZ A-Class scored 97%, for example.

In stark contrast is the disappointing 40% scored by the HOLDEN Barina — one of the poorest results of recent years in any car category — which is based on an older

Daewoo design. Crash safety clearly wasn't a priority when designing this car.

Side airbags protect

There's also more evidence that models with side and head airbags (as well as front) generally do a better job of protecting their occupants than those without: see the two sets of results for the FORD Territory, TOYOTA Kluger and TOYOTA Yaris.

Both types of airbag are designed to offer protection in side impacts: side airbags for the body, head airbags (also called curtain or head-protecting side airbags) for the head.

In Europe, these airbags are already standard in most car models. CHOICE would like to see car manufacturers here make them readily available across their entire model range as well — preferably as standard equipment, or at least as a standalone option and not combined in a more expensive package with other features a buyer may not want.

From a safety point of view, ANCAP recommends not just looking for a model with airbags when buying a car, but also considering additional safety features such as ABS, electronic stability control and traction control, as

they all decrease the risk of being involved in an accident in the first place.

What's tested?

The test consists of two main crashes (offset and side impact, scoring up to 16 points each), an optional pole test (two points), and an assessment of the seatbelt warning system (up to three points). The score out of a maximum of 37 points is then converted to the occupant protection rating given in the table.

- **Offset crash:** The car is crashed at 64 km/h into a fixed barrier with a crushable aluminium face. Only 40% of the car's front (on the driver's side) hits the barrier. This simulates crashing into another car.

- **Side-impact crash:** A 950 kg trolley with a crushable aluminium face is run into the driver's side of the stationary car at 50 km/h. This test simulates a fairly small car striking the driver's door. Cars with a relatively high seating position, such as four-wheel drives, can be expected to perform well in this test. ANCAP therefore decided to award certain cars (such as 4WDs) a score of 100% by default, without carrying out the test.

- Models with head airbags are eligible for the optional **pole test**, which can earn an additional two points for a low risk of head injury. This test simulates a vehicle sliding sideways into a pole at 29 km/h and hitting it in line with the head of the seated driver.

- Models with an **advanced seatbelt warning system** can earn up to three additional points. The system has to meet a range of requirements, such as detecting which seats are taken, whether the seatbelts in those seats are used, and whether the car is in use. If any of the seatbelts for occupied seats aren't used, the system needs to give a visual and audible warning signal.

There's also a **pedestrian protection test** to estimate injuries to pedestrians struck by a vehicle at 40 km/h. This is reported separately in the table; the higher the score, the better the protection.

What's assessed?

The **occupant protection rating** is based on the following assessments from the above tests:

- The car's **structure**: among other things, does the passenger compartment keep its shape, and how far are the steering column and pedals pushed inwards?
- The car's **restraint system**: for example, does the driver or passenger hit any hard parts of the car?
- **Injury risks**, using crash test dummies fitted with sensors that measure forces and movements.

Crash test results are only comparable for vehicles within the same car category. ■

Make / model / year / engine size (airbags) ranked in order of overall occupant protection within category (A)	Occupant protection rating (%)	Pedestrian protection rating (%)
Large 4WDs		
# Subaru Tribeca, 2006 on, 3.0 L (front, side, head) (B)	89	nt
# Nissan Pathfinder Ti, 2006 on, 2.5 L diesel (front, side, head)	87	49
# Ford Territory TS, 2006 on, 4.0 L (front, side) (B)	85	nt
# Ford Territory TX, 2006 on, 4.0 L (front) (B)	80	nt
# Hyundai Tucson Elite, 2006 on, 2.2 L diesel (front, side, head) (C)	79	11
Toyota Kluger Grande, 2003 on, 3.3 L (front, side, head) (B)	77	nt
Jeep Grand Cherokee, 2005 on, 3.0 L diesel (front, side, head)	72	0
Toyota Kluger CVX, 2003 on, 3.3 L (front) (B)	71	nt
Luxury cars		
# Peugeot 407 Coupé, 2006 on, 2.2 L (front, side, head) (D)	96	41
# Alfa Romeo 159, 2006 on, 1.9 L diesel (front, side, head) (E)	94	25
BMW 3-series, 2005 on, 3.2 L (front, side, head)	94	11
Lexus GS300, 2005 on, 3.0 L (front, side, head) (F)	94	49
# Citroën C6, 2006 on, 3.0 L (front, side, head)	91	78
# VW Passat, 2006 on, 1.9 L diesel (front, side, head)	86	46
Large car		
# Mitsubishi 380, 2005 on, 3.8 L (front, side) (B)	76	5
Small cars		
# Mercedes Benz A-class, 2005 on, 1.5 L (front, side, head)	97	46
# Toyota Yaris, 2005 on, 1.0 L (front, side, head)	94	49
Citroën C4, 2005 on, 1.6 L (front, side, head)	93	62
# Fiat Punto, 2006 on, 1.2 L (front, side, head)	90	53
# Toyota Yaris, 2005 on, 1.3 L (front) (B)	80	49
Suzuki Swift, 2005 on, 1.3 L (front, side, head) (G)	77	55
# Citroën C3, 2003 on, 1.4 L (front, side)	75	29
Holden Tegra, 2005 on, 1.4 L (front, side)	71	28
Smart Forfour, 2003 on, 1.3 L (front, side) (F)	70	19
# Nissan Tiida ST, 2006 on, 1.8 L (front) (B)	69	34
# Holden Barina, 12/2005 on, 1.6 L (front) (B)	40	23
Van		
# Toyota Hiace LWB, 2005 on, 2.7 L (front) (B)	64	18

Source: Crash test data from the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP), which is supported by Australian and New Zealand motoring organisations, all Australian state governments, the New Zealand Government and the FIA Foundation.

Part of the 2006 ANCAP update.

nt Not tested

(A) Unless otherwise stated, the left-hand-drive European model was tested by EuroNCAP. Australian specifications may vary and models sold in Australia might provide slightly different levels of protection from those described.

(B) The Australian model was tested.

(C) The Australian model has a 2.7 L petrol engine.

(D) The Australian model has a 2.9 L engine.

(E) The Australian diesel model has a 2.2 L engine.

(F) The right-hand drive European model was tested by EuroNCAP.

(G) The Australian model has a 1.4 L engine.

(H) The Australian model has a 1.5 L engine.

MORE ONLINE

You have online access to detailed results from this latest round of ANCAP crash testing, as well as the results for all the cars tested since the start of the program. Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on 'ANCAP' crash test database' under 'Cars' in the index. 

Bendigo Bank: the fairest card of all?

The October 2006 issue of CHOICE profiled the often punitive ways that credit card companies calculate interest on late payments, as well as fairer methods that companies such as BANK OF QUEENSLAND and NSW TEACHERS CREDIT

UNION use. The comparison applies to cards with interest-free days.

BENDIGO BANK wasn't included (it didn't return our survey in time), but we've since analysed the way it calculates interest. Like every other card provider, it's not perfect (for example, it only gives 14 interest-free days after the statement is sent out — most other card providers give 25 days — and its terms and conditions could be clearer), but we rate its method of interest calculation as the fairest of the companies we analysed.

For one late-payment case study scenario we looked at (the same one that we used on page 16 of the October article), BENDIGO would charge \$8.44 interest. For exactly the same transactions and assuming the same 10% interest rate, 'meaner' card companies would charge up to 120% more (\$18.96).

Unlike many companies, when you pay your bill late or not in full, BENDIGO BANK:

- Only charges interest on the amount that wasn't paid off on time.

- Gives an interest-free period to new purchases even if you're carrying an unpaid debt from the previous month.
- Only 'backdates' interest to the date the last statement was produced (not to an earlier date, such as when the actual purchase was made).
- The late payment fee (\$15) only applies if a repayment of more than \$25 is overdue by more than 30 days.

BENDIGO's Basic Black card — its lowest-rate card — uses this method to calculate interest and has a competitive interest rate (9.95%). The downside is there's a \$45 annual fee.

We also surveyed credit union MECU. Unfortunately we rank its methods of calculating interest as 'mean', along with those of the eight other credit card companies noted in the October article. On the plus side, MECU's Visa card has no annual fee and 25 interest-free days — good for those who always pay their bill on time.

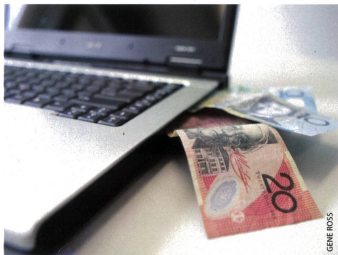


Top internet savings accounts

Online savings accounts pay far better interest rates than normal transaction accounts and are the ideal place for your emergency funds, to save for a holiday or even to set up a fund for this year's Christmas presents. They usually need to be linked to a transaction account because they normally don't provide ATM access or EFTPOS. To access the funds you need to transfer money via online or phone banking back to the transaction account.

See the table below for the best three accounts that are open to everyone. Our analysis didn't include credit unions with restricted membership and accounts that aren't widely available or only pay interest if you don't make withdrawals, although some of them have competitive rates.

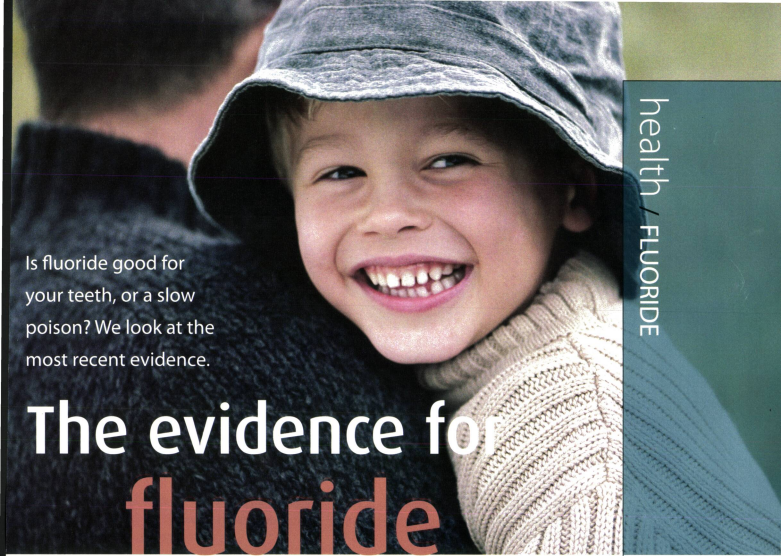
Tip To help your savings, set up a direct debit from your transaction account to regularly deposit funds in your savings account.



Institution	Product	Interest rate (%)	Website
Bankwest Direct	TeleNet Saver	6.80/6.25 (A)	bankwest.com.au
Queensland Professional CU	Netsaver Account \$50	6.35	qldprofcu.com.au
Easy Street Financial Services	Easy Savings Account	6.20	easystreet.com.au

Interest rates from Cannex, 15 January 2007.

(A) 6.80% variable 12-month introductory rate for new customers; standard rate currently 6.25%



Is fluoride good for your teeth, or a slow poison? We look at the most recent evidence.

The evidence for fluoride

Beaconsfield, Tasmania, is famous for more than a mine rescue — in 1953 it was the first town in Australia to add fluoride to its water supply. Now every capital city except Brisbane has water fluoridation and, on average, Australians have much healthier teeth than 50 years ago.

To what extent is this due to fluoride? Health authorities are convinced of its benefits but opponents continue to maintain that fluoride in the water supply does nothing to prevent tooth decay. And you've probably seen claims that it may in fact damage teeth by causing dental fluorosis, often with concerns that it may be adversely affecting our health in other ways (see *Fluoride's downside*, page 27).

There have been some substantial new research, analyses and major reviews since our last article on fluoridation in 1997. While still a controversial topic that can arouse strong passions, it's now clear that the dental health benefits claimed for fluoridation are well supported by scientific evidence — and that the risks have been greatly exaggerated.

Furthermore, fluoridation provides a considerable benefit to consumers through savings in dental costs and reduction in toothache and treatment trauma.

The case for fluoride

Most water supplies contain some fluoride naturally (it's the thirteenth most abundant element in the earth's crust). Fluoridation is the process of topping up the natural fluoride content of the public water supply to a level high enough to improve dental health. It's been done, here and overseas, for more than 50 years — long enough to provide reliable information about the benefits (and the risks).

But research findings in this area have always been controversial. The purity of our water supply is an emotive topic and research findings are sometimes conflicting. But this is a problem common to much of medical research. Humans are complex organisms and, considered alone, individual studies are often only pointers — the way forward comes from systematic evaluation of the evidence as a whole.

Evidence from the UK

In 2000, a group of 10 experts (commissioned by the UK National Health Service) conducted a systematic review of the entire body of scientific evidence on public water fluoridation available at the time. Though they found >

IN A NUTSHELL

- There's now solid scientific evidence that fluoride added to drinking water helps to protect your teeth from decay.
- The claims of those who oppose fluoridation are often based on outdated information, questionable research and selectively picking studies that support their case.
- There's no convincing evidence for harmful effects from fluoride at the levels used in our water supply.

< much of the research lacked rigour, they found the evidence strong enough to conclude that:

- Fluoridation of drinking water really does reduce the prevalence of decayed teeth, increasing the percentage of children totally free from tooth decay by about 15%.
- Fluoride in drinking water provides an additional benefit over and above that derived from fluoride in toothpaste and topical applications provided by dentists.

Further investigation by the UK Department of Health confirmed these findings, examined additional research and highlighted the benefits of fluoridation for adults as well as children. This second report (published in 2002) found evidence that, in general, more adults are keeping more of their own teeth into old age, and having less trouble with them, where there's fluoride in the drinking water. The report also emphasised additional benefits such as reductions in the number of people suffering from toothache or requiring general anaesthesia for dental treatment.

Australian research

Many Australian cities have added fluoride to the water since the 1970s, so millions of people have now been supplied with drinking water containing fluoride at the recommended levels for long enough for the benefits to be clearly evaluated from health statistics.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) reviewed the evidence in 1999 and concluded that, "Water fluoridation at optimal levels, varying from 0.6 ppm in subtropical regions to 1.1 in temperate climates, continues to provide significant benefits in the prevention of dental caries for both deciduous [baby] and permanent teeth. The evidence for a protective effect on dental health is strongest in childhood but can also be demonstrated in adults." ('ppm' means parts per million

— 1 ppm would be equivalent to 2 L of fluoride in an Olympic pool containing two million litres of water.)

These conclusions are supported by more recent research. In NSW, a major 2005 study that examined the dental records of nearly a quarter of a million schoolchildren aged 3–15 found that those living in areas with fluoridated water were significantly less likely to have decayed, missing or filled teeth than children living in areas without added fluoride in the drinking water.

Another 2005 study of 973 Australian army recruits showed that those with no exposure to water fluoridation had 40% more filled, missing or decayed teeth than recruits who had grown up with fluoridation.

Many people are less dependent on getting fluoride from water, though, than in the past. Most people now use toothpaste that contains fluoride, and everyone's exposed to fluoride in foods and drinks manufactured in fluoridated areas, the so-called 'halo effect'. But even though improvements in dental health are now smaller, over the population as a whole they still represent a lot of teeth saved from decay.

Another plus from widely available fluoridated water is that it helps kids from lower socio-economic groups, who are at the greatest risk of tooth decay. They're less likely to be regularly brushing their teeth, and even less likely to see a dentist.

How does fluoride work?

Tooth decay (dental caries) begins when some of the enamel, the outer surface of the tooth, is destroyed by acid. The acid is produced by bacteria that can grow on the surfaces of teeth in a layer called plaque. When your teeth are exposed to foods or drinks containing sugars, the bacteria rapidly convert some of the sugars into acid. The plaque can hold the acid in contact with the

Q&A

Q: I've heard that where some cities overseas have abandoned fluoridation, their rates of dental decay have continued to decline. Doesn't this prove that fluoridation doesn't work?

A: Although this is often claimed, the 2000 UK review found that out of 16 studies reporting on what happens if fluoridation is stopped, 12 found that the rate of tooth decay increased again.

Q: Hasn't fluoridation been banned in Europe?

A: No, fluoridation is permitted under European Union regulations. In some countries water fluoridation isn't practical because of very complex water systems without a central point to add fluoride. As a substitute for fluoride in water, many countries add fluoride to salt, which is then used in products like bread that most people eat, while others add fluoride to milk.

Q: I've seen claims that proponents of fluoridation are suppressing scientific evidence.

A: The UK experts considered this claim from a statistical point of view. They concluded that any missed (or concealed) study would have to be very large and very different from those that they analysed to overturn the overall beneficial result for water fluoridation. In any case, in the internet age any credible research can be brought into the public domain for review and debate.

Q: Isn't fluoridation unethical? Some people consider it mass medication.

A: It's more equivalent to fortifying breakfast cereals with vitamins and minerals to help prevent shortages than medication to cure a disease.

tooth surface for up to two hours before it's neutralised by saliva.

All the time that the enamel is exposed to acid it loses calcium and phosphate minerals into the plaque. Once the plaque acids have been neutralised the minerals can return to the enamel — a process called remineralisation. But the capacity for remineralisation is limited, so if you eat a series of sugary snacks through the day your natural defences don't get enough time to do their stuff before the next assault on your tooth enamel.

Fluoride helps to protect your teeth in at least three ways:

- It promotes repair of early damage to the enamel.
- It improves the chemical structure of the enamel, making it more resistant to acid attack.
- It reduces the ability of the bacteria on your teeth to produce acid.

Fluoride's downside

Fluoride's definitely poisonous if you're exposed to too much of it. A dose of less than a gram of sodium fluoride can cause nausea and vomiting; 5–10 g can be lethal. Not surprisingly, a major criticism of the public fluoridated water program is that it can provide too much fluoride.

- Too much fluoride can cause dental fluorosis, a condition where the enamel surface of the teeth becomes mottled in appearance. Most dental fluorosis is very mild and doesn't damage teeth, and it occurs only during tooth development in early childhood, so older children and adults aren't at risk. Although it's more common in fluoridated areas, it can occur in other areas as well.

Most fluorosis seems to be associated with kids swallowing too much fluoride toothpaste, or parents giving them fluoride supplements. Fluorosis levels have halved since the early 1990s with the wider use of special

low-fluoride children's toothpastes and recommendations that children use only very small amounts of toothpaste.

But it's an area that health authorities continue to monitor.

- It's known that high amounts of fluoride can also cause fluorosis of the bones, increasing your risk of fracture. It occurs most commonly in countries such as India and Pakistan where the natural concentration of fluoride in the water can be as high as 18 ppm.

A number of studies have looked for a relationship between exposure to fluoride at about 1 ppm and the risk of bone fracture. The results have varied, but when both of the UK expert reports looked at the results overall they concluded that there's no proven additional risk of bone fracture associated with water fluoridation.

An Australian review in 2001 looked at 33 individual studies and concluded that fluoride to 1 ppm doesn't have an adverse effect on bone strength, mineral density or evidence of fractures.

- There have been claims that long-term exposure to levels of fluoride even as low as those found in Australian water may cause bone cancer or birth defects. The two expert reports from the UK found no association between bone cancer and fluoridation. The Australian NHMRC report considered three controlled studies and came to the same conclusion. And there's no sound evidence at all that fluoride causes birth defects. Studies haven't found any increase in their prevalence, even in those areas of India and Africa that have very high levels of fluoride in the water.

Is this the end of the story?

There's a continuing need for high-quality research to track any potential harmful effects of fluoridation. But at present the evidence is very strong that it's a safe and effective public health measure. ■

BOTTLED WATER

Recent surveys have shown that tooth decay in Australian children is on the increase again. Experts are suggesting this coincides with the rise in popularity of bottled water and sports drinks that don't contain fluoride (sugary juices and soft drinks are also likely culprits). CHOICE and dental experts would like manufacturers to offer people the option of bottled water containing about 1 ppm of fluoride (the same as tap water in fluoridated areas).

Fluoride toothpaste

Most toothpaste contains fluoride. Clinical trials have shown that while fluoride toothpaste definitely helps prevent tooth decay, it isn't as effective a public health program as fluoridated drinking water, which provides significant benefits for children and adults over and above those from fluoride toothpaste.

And fluoride toothpaste isn't suitable for small children because there's a risk that they'll swallow too much of it and develop dental fluorosis (see *Fluoride's downside*, above).

Experts recommend that:

- You don't use any toothpaste when cleaning very small children's teeth (up to the age of about 18 months).
- Children aged between 18 months and five years should use low-fluoride toothpaste (0.04–0.05% fluoride). They should clean their teeth twice a day with adult supervision, use only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste and be taught to spit it out and not swallow.
- Kids aged six or more should clean their teeth with standard fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day, and not swallow.

If you live in an area without fluoridated water your kids might need to start using fluoride toothpaste earlier — check with your dentist.



Water-wise showers

With Australia said to be in the grip of a one-in-1000-year drought, few doubt that it's time to get serious about water conservation. As a timely reminder of the devastation caused by water shortages, the theme of this year's United Nations World Water Day on 22 March is *Coping with Water Scarcity*.

Changing to a water-efficient showerhead is one of the easiest ways to reduce your water usage. A standard showerhead uses 15–25 L of water per minute, compared to no more than 9 L per minute for a three-star water-efficient showerhead. A four-person household could also save around \$100 a year in water and electricity charges by switching to a water-efficient showerhead.

Governments and water companies offer various incentives for consumers to make the switch and some states require all new houses and renovated bathrooms to include water-efficient showerheads (see *Water efficiency rebates*, far right).

But will you still get a decent shower? To find out we put 15 water-efficient wall-mounted showerheads to the test in one of the more unusual user trials CHOICE conducts (see *How we tested*, below).

The verdict

Overall our trialists were satisfied with most of the showerheads they tested. The top six models did particularly well and only one model scored very poorly.

The most common complaint about the showerheads was that the water pressure was too weak, even



WHAT TO BUY

SATINJET Futura Wall Shower on Upswept Arm	\$132
FLEXISPRAY Bermuda II Wall Shower Fixed Arm	BEST BUY \$34
METHVEN Olympic 3000 Hi-Rise 1 Function	\$88
DELRANA LUXURY SHOWERS Marlin Rose on Fixed Arm	BEST BUY \$46
DORF Stayfast Universal Shower	BEST BUY \$41
GRACOTT Crys on Arm	\$132

among some of the highest-scoring models. "It was less of a shower and more of a light drizzle," was a trialist's assessment of one of the showerheads. "Felt like I was standing under a sprinkler," said another.

But there were some notable exceptions. The DELRANA LUXURY SHOWERS Marlin Rose was praised for its stronger water pressure — and, at \$46, it's also one of the cheaper models in the test. The NOVELLI TAPWARE Riviera also has good water pressure and scored well overall, though just outside the *What to buy* list.

It's difficult to tell how well a showerhead will work until you use it and there aren't any particular features you can look for. Most of the models tested have adjustable spray settings but of the four that don't, three are in the *What to buy* list.

Instantaneous hot water systems (and some gravity-fed systems) may not have a sufficient flowrate for these

IN A NUTSHELL

- Our trialists were satisfied with most of the showerheads on test, and the top six in particular.
- The most common complaint was weak water pressure, but not all models have this problem.



HOW WE TESTED

- We hired four hotel rooms at the **Mercure Hotel, Sydney Airport**, which kindly allowed our plumber to install and change the water-efficient showerheads over four nights.
- Sixteen trialists (11 women and five men) each tested all 15 showerheads; they weren't told the showerheads were water-efficient.
- For each showerhead, the trialists had a five-minute shower, during which they shampooed and rinsed their hair and lathered and rinsed their bodies with soap.

- After each shower the trialists completed a survey. They were asked to rate the effectiveness of each showerhead at wetting the body and hair and rinsing off soap and shampoo. They were also asked whether there was full coverage of water over the body and whether they liked the feel of the spray, as well as how easy it was to adjust the temperature and spray.
- Finally they were asked how satisfying the shower was overall and how likely they'd be to buy the showerhead.

showerheads to work properly. Check with the retailer to see if your system is suitable.

The WELS scheme

The Water-efficient Labelling and Standards (WELS) scheme requires a number of household products, including showerheads, to be rated and labelled according to their water efficiency. This scheme replaces the old voluntary AAA rating system.

Models with a three-star rating (currently the highest for showerheads) use 9 L of water per minute or less. All the tested showerheads have three stars. The most water-efficient model in the trial, though — the METHVEN Olympic 3000 — only uses 7.5 L of water per minute and scored a very good 80% overall. Higher star ratings for showerheads that use even less water are expected to be introduced within the next year. >

Water efficiency rebates

A number of state and local governments, along with some water companies, offer incentives to switch to a water-efficient showerhead, and some of the showerheads tested are eligible for these incentives in some states. Incentives offered include:

- Queensland residents can apply for a rebate of 50% of the price of a water-efficient showerhead (up to \$30).
- If you live in Victoria, SA, WA, Hobart or some areas in Queensland you can apply for a \$10 rebate on the price of a water-efficient showerhead.
- A number of councils (including Toowoomba, Queensland, and Port Phillip, Victoria) provide residents with a free water-efficient showerhead in exchange for their old standard one.
- Sydney Water sells a number of water-efficient showerheads at a large discount, including the FLEXISPRAY Bermuda II, METHVEN Olympic 3000, DORF Stayfast and both the INTERBATH models in this test.
- Sydney Water customers can also pay just \$22 for a qualified plumber to install water-saving devices and check for leaks. A water-efficient showerhead (worth \$60) is supplied and installed as part of the fee.
- A similar service exists in the ACT for \$30.
- A rebate of up to \$50 for water-efficient devices, including showerheads, is available for residents of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

All new homes and bathroom renovations in Queensland (that are connected to the mains water supply) are required to have water-efficient showerheads. In Victoria new homes, and in NSW new homes and renovations, must reach certain sustainability targets before planning permission is granted. Installing water-efficient showerheads can help to meet these targets.

Water-saving tips

The bathroom accounts for around 49% of all water used inside the home. Here are some tips on how to use a little less.

- Install water-efficient taps or tap aerators, which screw onto the end of the tap and give the feel of a higher flowrate while actually reducing it and aerating the water.
- Install a dual-flush toilet, which allows you to flush either half or all the amount of water in the cistern.
- Don't leave the tap running while you brush your teeth or shave.
- A dripping tap can waste more than 2000 L of water a month. Prevent taps from leaking by turning them off tightly and replacing washers as soon as they begin to leak.
- Check for leaks in the toilet by pouring a few drops of food colouring into the cistern. If the colour then appears in the pan (without flushing) you have a leak.
- Limit shower times to five minutes.





profiles

The models in the What to buy list are profiled in rank order.



SATINJET FUTURA WALL SHOWER ON UPSWEPT ARM

Price: \$132

The top performer in the test — almost all the trialists said this showerhead stood out for its full coverage of spray over the whole body. Most trialists found it to be very effective at wetting and rinsing the body and hair. This is also the only model in the trial with a button to change the spray setting (instead of having to twist the showerhead).

The only downside is its water pressure, which several trialists thought was too weak.

Trialist comments

"Brilliant — by far the best water coverage."

"A bit more pressure through the showerhead would convince me [to buy it]."



METHVEN OLYMPIC 3000 HI-RISE 1 FUNCTION

Price: \$88

This is the most water-efficient showerhead in the trial (7.5 L/min). Most trialists thought it had full coverage and some commented on how easy it was to move to the desired angle. But several trialists thought the water pressure was too weak.

Trialist comments

"It rotated as well as moved in all directions, so was very good at positioning the showerhead... where you'd like it."

"Not enough pressure — with one minute to go, I was still getting suds out."



DORF STAYFAST UNIVERSAL SHOWER

Price: \$41

Most trialists thought this showerhead was very effective at wetting the body and hair, but less effective at rinsing out shampoo. It's one of the cheaper models in the trial but many thought the water pressure was too weak.

Trialist comments

"Good coverage in both the spray and spout area — just not great pressure."



FLEXISPRAY BERMUDA II WALL SHOWER FIXED ARM

Price: \$34

This is the cheapest showerhead in the What to buy list and scored very well overall. The majority of trialists liked the feel of the spray from this model and several commented on the good water pressure when it was on the massage setting. But some trialists complained about low coverage.

Trialist comments

"Only two settings but easy to move."

"Seems to hit only certain parts of the body, need to constantly move around."



DELORANA LUXURY SHOWERS MARLIN ROSE ON FIXED ARM

Price: \$46

This is one of the cheaper models in the trial and, although it's comparatively small, many trialists were impressed by its stronger water pressure.

Trialist comments

"Showerhead was too small to get the full coverage, but not a problem due to the pressure and flow."

"The pressure was great."



GRACOTT CRYSTAL ARM

Price: \$132

This is a comparatively big showerhead and most trialists thought it provided full coverage. Some trialists also liked the design of this model. But several felt it lacked sufficient water pressure.

Trialist comments

"Nice-looking showerhead. It had a nice style about it."

"Could have been a little more pressure, but was comfortable."



Generally the other showerheads in the trial weren't considered as effective as the top six. A few notable comments include:

- The NOVELLI TAPWARE Riviera stood out for its good water pressure. The BREWERS and AUSCAN showerheads also had good water pressure, but were let down by their poorer coverage.
- The CAROMA Multifunction Shower Mystic was criticised for its inadequate water pressure.
- THE PACIFIC Aqualine All Directional Shower Set was the cheapest showerhead in the trial at only \$20. Several trialists were impressed by its full coverage but thought it needed stronger water pressure.
- Several trialists thought the IRWELL Invigra showerhead was too small to provide good coverage.
- The INTERBATH Classic II Rainmaker scored higher overall than the INTERBATH Rio Massage, despite being cheaper. A few trialists thought some of the Rio's five settings were unnecessary (including a 'trickle' setting some described as "useless").
- The DELRANA LUXURY SHOWERS Kestrel Rose scored a poor 30% overall. Most trialists commented that the pressure was too weak and it was very ineffective at wetting the body. "It just didn't do the job. It would have been good for watering herbs," said one trialist.

MODEL	SCORE	FEATURES	SPECIFICATIONS		
			L/minute	Contact	Price (\$)
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall satisfaction (%)	Adjustable or fixed spray			
SatinJet Futura Wall Shower on Upswept Arm #FLX61	85	Adjustable	9	www.methven.biz/au	132
Flexispray Bermuda II Wall Shower Fixed Arm #FLX96	80	Adjustable	9	www.methven.biz/au	34
Methven Olympic 3000 Hi-Rise 1 Function #FLX 08	80	Fixed	7.5	www.methven.biz/au	88
Delrana Luxury Showers Marlin Rose on Fixed Arm #R110FCP	75	Fixed	9	www.delrana.com	46
Dorf Stayfast Universal Shower #3182.04.5	75	Fixed	9	www.dorf-clark.com.au	41
Gracott Crys on Arm #ART 58720	75	Adjustable	9	03 9580 0100	132
Caroma Multifunction Shower Mystic #91010C3A	70	Adjustable	9	www.dorf-clark.com.au	41
Novelli Tapware Shower Collection Riviera #1983	70	Adjustable	9	www.novellitapware.com.au	100
Pacific Aqualine All Directional Shower Set #PP1463	70	Fixed	9	www.pacifictaps.com.au	20
Irwell Invigra Adjustable Shower #872711C3A	65	Adjustable	9	www.dorf-clark.com.au	32
Brewers Shower Therapy Massager on All Directional Arm #TMADC	60	Adjustable	9	www.brewers.com.au	49
Interbath Classic II Rainmaker Hi-Lo Showerhead #0V000LCH	60	Adjustable	9	www.interbath.com	65
Auscan Showerhead — Watersaver #801CP	55	Adjustable	9	02 9888 1888	45
Interbath Rio Massage Hi-Lo Showerhead #B2542SCH	55	Adjustable	9	www.interbath.com	79
Delrana Luxury Showers Kestrel Rose on Fixed Arm #R140FCP	30	Adjustable	9	www.delrana.com	50

USING THE TABLE

Score The 'overall satisfaction' score is based on a five-point scale ranging from 'very satisfying' (5) to 'very unsatisfying' (1). From these ratings an average overall satisfaction score was calculated for each showerhead and converted to a percentage. Due to the small number of trialists, they've been rounded to the nearest 5%.

Price The price we paid in October 2006 for showerhead and arm.

Where's Grohe?

GROHE is a major manufacturer of showerheads and does have wall-mounted water-efficient models in its range. However, the information we received from GROHE at the time of the trial suggested that it only had handheld showerheads available, and we didn't think it was appropriate to compare a handheld model with the wall-mounted showerheads in the trial. We learnt of its wall models too late to include them.

Caffeine hit at home

If you're a coffee fan, an espresso machine is probably on your wish list for this year. Apart from looking great in your kitchen, the appeal of having a creamy latte or a quality short black in your hand before you've even changed out of your pyjamas in the morning can't be denied.

While an espresso machine may sound like the perfect solution for avoiding the queue in your local café, a home coffee machine mightn't be for everyone. They can be expensive, and they need cleaning after every use so aren't particularly handy for making more than a couple of cups at a time. To get the best coffee you'll need to invest in a grinder for beans (no pre-ground coffee for the perfectionists), and you'll need some practice with the milk frother to produce the perfect cup.

But if you just want good coffee at home or your nearest café is too far away, investing in a good espresso machine could be worth it. We give you the lowdown on 15 manual and semi-automatic espresso machines.

Your cup runneth over

The main difference between manual and semi-automatic machines is that a semi-automatic switches off when it's poured a preset amount of coffee into the cup. With a manual you have to keep an eye on it and cut off the flow when there's enough coffee in your cup.

Fully automatic (and generally much more expensive) machines do almost everything for you, including grinding the beans.

IN A NUTSHELL

• Espresso machines can be high-maintenance: how much do you love your coffee and will you really use a machine enough to make it worth the investment?



HOW WE TESTED

- To remove any factory smells and tastes, our tester pumped a litre of hot water through each of the machines, and then made 12 cups of espresso coffee in each.
- He checked how simple the machines are to use, trying out the controls, the coffee holder and how easy the machine is to refill with water and coffee.
- He measured the temperature of coffee produced in each machine.
- He frothed milk in a jug, looking for a fine, pourable texture.
- For the all-important taste test we invited three coffee industry professionals to rate 30 mL short blacks (espressos) from each machine in 'blind' tastings.

The daily grind

- Try out different brands and roasts to see which you like best. Our inhouse tester/barista swears by using beans from small local roasters, which he believes to be fresher than those available from major brands in supermarkets.
- For the best and freshest-tasting coffee, grind your beans just a few minutes before you use them.
- If you're feeling really adventurous you can buy green beans and roast them yourself — some people use a popcorn popper. >



WHAT TO BUY

Using ground coffee beans

MAGIMIX L'Espresso Program Automatic 11233	\$499
SUNBEAM Café Latte EMS600	BEST BUY \$299

Using Nespresso capsules

DE'LONGHI Le Cube EN185.M+ Aeroccino	\$449
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The DELONGHI came third overall, with a good coffee taste test score of 70%, but it's different from the other machines on test. While they use ground coffee beans, it only uses Nespresso 'capsules', which are available in 12 flavours, bought by phone or mail order in packs of five (each contains 10 capsules). The 'Roma' flavour we used cost \$37.40 including delivery, which took only a day after placing the order by phone.

Using Nespresso capsules increases the price of a cup of coffee from around 20 to more than 60 cents, but the great advantage is in making it very easy both to make coffee and clean up afterwards. The DELONGHI didn't froth milk as well in our tests as many of the other models, but if you're attracted by its simplicity it'll give you a good cup of coffee.



profiles

The models in the What to buy list are profiled in rank order.

Using ground coffee beans



MAGIMIX L'Espresso Program Automatic 11233

Price: \$499

Good points

- Equal top in the taste test.
- Good for frothing milk.
- Fairly consistent temperature when making consecutive cups.
- Easy to use, with good controls.
- Programmable coffee delivery allows you to adjust the amount of coffee in the cup.
- Cup warming plate.
- Easy to clean the exterior.
- Semi-automatic.

Bad points

- Nothing in particular.



SUNBEAM Café Latte EM5600

Price: \$299

Good points

- Equal top in the taste test.
- Good for frothing milk.
- 'Drip tray full' indicator.
- Cup warming plate.
- Very easy to clean the exterior.
- Semi-automatic.
- The cheapest machine tested.

Bad points

- Nothing in particular.

BEST BUY

Using Nespresso capsules



DELONGHI Le Cube EN185.5M+ Aeroccino

Price: \$449

This machine can only make coffee using Nespresso capsules, available in 12 flavours. See *What to buy*, below left, for more on the pros and cons of this.

Good points

- Good score in the taste test.
- Programmable coffee delivery allows you to adjust the amount of coffee in the cup.
- Very easy to empty the coffee capsule container.
- Very easy to clean the exterior.
- No need for a coffee grinder.

Bad points

- The capsules are more expensive than buying coffee beans.
- Can only make one cup at a time.
- Relatively small water tank.
- Controls are hard to push.
- The first cup of coffee is cooler when making consecutive cups.
- Only rated 60% for frothing milk — it uses a different type of milk frothing mechanism, a plastic jug with a stirrer, that doesn't achieve very good results.



about the rest

- In our tests coffee making, which includes the taste and temperature of the coffee produced, is weighted heavily over other factors such as ease of use and milk frothing. While most of the models tested are easy to use, all but the three in the *What to buy* list rated 65% or lower in the taste test; the SAEKO Via Venezia Espresso and STARBUCKS Barista were equal worst at just 40%.
- The ECM Botticelli II, while rating equal fourth overall, is an expensive machine at \$995 and only scored 60% in the taste test.
- The VICE VERSA Koala and KRUPS XP 4050 don't froth milk very well.



OUR EXPERTS

Our expert tasters are (from left to right): Lance Witham from Witham's Coffee & Tea, and David Gee and Matthew Gee from Barista Basics Coffee Academy.

Our tester finds that generally a better quality of creamy froth is achieved without the froth enhancer, though you might need some time to master the method.

MODEL		PERFORMANCE				COFFEE-MAKING	
Brand / model (in rank order)	Type	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Milk frothing score (%)	Coffee making score (%)	Taste test score (%)	Heat-up time (min:sec)
Magimix L'Espresso Program Automatic 11233	Semi-automatic	77	78	75 (A)	77	75	1:30
Sunbeam Café Latte EM5600	Semi-automatic	76	76	75	76	75	0:45
Delonghi Le Cube EN185.M + Aeroccino	Manual	70	76	60	69	70	0:45
ECM Botticelli II	Manual	69	74	85	64	60	2:45
Kenwood ES630	Semi-automatic	69	76	85 (A)	62	55	2:45
Krups XP 4050	Manual	69	70	55	70	65	1:30
Solis Crema SL 90	Manual	67	76	85	60	55	1:45
Rancilio Miss Silvia	Manual	66	70	85	61	60	2:00
Ascaso Dream M F	Manual	63	76	70 (A)	56	50	1:30
Breville 800ES	Manual	63	74	75 (A)	56	50	2:00
La Pavoni Eurobar De Luxe V230	Manual	62	66	80 (A)	57	50	1:30
Vice Versa Koala	Manual	62	70	55	59	55	2:00
Bodum 3020 Euro Granos	Manual	61	62	65 (A)	60	55	0:45
Saeco Via Venezia Espresso	Manual	59	72	80 (A)	49	40	1:30
Starbucks Barista	Manual	58	72	75	48	40	1:30



what to look for

- When you're in the shop, ask the sales assistant to make a cup of coffee using the machine you're interested in. Many large retailers have working machines on the floor so this shouldn't be a problem.
- Ask them to make your coffee with milk if you usually drink it that way, and check the milk frothing mechanism makes creamy, quality froth without large bubbles. Some machines come with an extra attachment called a froth enhancer — while it's easy to use it tends to put large bubbles into the milk, which isn't ideal. Our tester finds that generally a better quality of creamy froth is achieved without the froth enhancer, though you might need some time to master the method.
- The controls should be easy to operate and any operation lights should be clearly visible.
- A large-capacity water tank that's easy to fill, a large filter basket that's easy to fill and empty, and an easy-to-clean drip tray.
- An exterior with few grooves will be easier to clean and won't trap dirt. While stainless steel and brushed aluminium machines look sexy, they take a bit more elbow grease to keep clean.
- A cup warming plate — all the tested models have one.
- With semi-automatic machines, programmable coffee delivery lets you adjust the amount of coffee in a cup.

An oldie but a goodie

The market has so many fancy (and expensive) machines that claim to do just about everything short of bringing you your cuppa in bed. But these bells and whistles can come at a high price, with some of the machines we tested topping out at around \$900–\$1000. Our reference machine from several previous tests, the BREVILLE Café Roma, rated reasonably well against many of the newly tested machines, with a score of 60% in the taste test. An upgraded version, the BREVILLE Café Roma ESP8C, is available in shops for around \$210.



JILLIE HOWARD



CORE COMPONENTS		FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS		
Coffee temperature score (%)	Coffee temperature range score (%)	Cord storage	Programmable coffee delivery	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)	Weight (kg)	Contact
96	95	✓	✓	31 x 26 x 25	5.7	www.cambur.com.au
75	85			33 x 26 x 27	9.1	www.sunbeam.com.au
76	53		✓	25 x 23 x 32	4.8	www.delonghi.com.au
73	90			41 x 24 x 29	10.8	www.ecm-espresso.com.au
86	93	✓	✓	37 x 28 x 31	6.4	www.kenwood-australia.com
77	100		✓	32 x 25 x 25	6.2	02 9748 7944
73	88	✓	(B)	31 x 28 x 24	7.2	www.diamond-c.co.au
72	60			35 x 24 x 29	11.8	www.mocopan.com.au
58	88	✓		34 x 24 x 28	6.5	www.cafefino.com.au
75	83	✓		32 x 26 x 31	11.2	www.breville.com.au
76	93			30 x 22 x 27	5.5	www.euroespresso.com.au
79	68	✓		31 x 27 x 33	4.7	1300 782 852
82	75		✓	41 x 36 x 32	10.2	1800 808 971
80	93	✓		33 x 24 x 29	7.0	www.saeco.com.au
79	85	✓		33 x 24 x 29	7.0	www.starbucks.com.au

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Ease of use score: 30%
- Milk frothing score: 10%
- Coffee making score: 60%

Coffee making consists of:

- Taste: 80%
- Coffee temperature: 10%
- Temperature range (consistency when making four cups of coffee in succession): 10%

Heat-up time isn't part of the coffee making score but is included for information.

Price Recommended retail as of November 2006.

(A) The test was done with the froth enhancer removed as this method gave the better result.

(B) There are six preset quantities plus manual control.

The perfect potion: hints for the home barista

- Before you use your new machine, flush about a litre of hot water through it to remove any factory flavours. Be sure to include the steam wand as well as the group (the holder for the ground coffee) and the filter.
- Once you heat up the machine, switch the pump on and see how the hot water comes out without the group handle being attached to the group head. Some machines tend to overheat the boiler, which makes the water too hot, with too much steam, which can burn the coffee granules. If this is the case with your machine, let some water out before making your coffee.
- The standard amount of ground coffee for an espresso (short black) is 7 g for 30 mL of water. If you like your coffee stronger and with more flavour, try increasing it to 8 or even 9 g. Or try reducing the amount of water to about 20–25 mL.
- If you're making a short black don't run more than 30 mL of water through the machine as it will extract too much flavour, making the coffee too bitter.
- Always use fresh water straight from the tap or bottled water. Discard stale water that's been sitting in the tank for a few days.
- During the warm-up period, keep the group handle

in the group head so that every part of the machine that comes into contact with the coffee gets hot.

- Warm the cups first. Some machines have an inbuilt cup warmer, or you can just run some hot water from the machine into the cups instead.
- If you like coffee with milk, consider buying a thermometer for your frothing jug. Milk should be heated to around 65–70°C; any higher and you risk burning it.
- Froth your milk straight after making the basic espresso; if you wait the coffee will cool down and the crema (the creamy foam on top) will start to disappear.
- Aim for a creamy milk froth with tiny bubbles. Every machine is different so it's a good idea to experiment with the steam operation. Ideally, steam should be constant and strong so you can froth the milk quickly. After frothing, bang the jug on the table to remove the larger bubbles, swirl it around, bang it again and then pour it straight onto the coffee. Clean the nozzle with a sponge between goes.
- Run a small amount of water though the machine after frothing milk to cool the internal parts down. This is important if you're going to make more coffees as the extra heat from the frothing process can burn the grind.

Music and more to go

They've become an almost essential accessory for those who like to take their music with them. But there's a lot more you can do with some of the digital music players (often called MP3 players after a common type of digital file) in our latest test. You can use them to store photos you take while on holiday, if you run out of room in your camera. To watch a movie, if the screen size allows. To store and transport datafiles, say from your workplace to home, much like you'd use a USB drive. And, of course, to store and play back large amounts of music in digital format.

If you're a novice with digital music, see our article in CHOICE, April 2006, for detailed information, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Apr 06 under 'digital music'. Briefly, though, to transfer your CDs onto a digital music player, you have to copy ('rip') them onto your computer and encode them before you can transfer them to the player — a process made legal just late last year. You can also download music directly from a legal music website or download audio broadcasts (podcasts).

Memory matters

Players using **flash memory** use no moving parts to store your music (and data) — it's stored on a memory chip. This means they tend to be smaller and lighter than models with a hard drive, but they also hold fewer songs

— roughly 500 can be stored on the flash players in this test (all with 2 GB memory).

Players with a **hard disc drive**, on the other hand, have greater capacity so you can store much more music, transport large files, etc.

Weight, size and shape

The MP3 players in our latest test — both flash and hard disc players — come in lots of different shapes and sizes. If you want one to carry around, a traditionally shaped, rectangular player is easily slipped into a pocket, especially if it's thin and relatively lightweight like the APPLE iPod Nano, SAMSUNG YP-Z5FQB or CREATIVE Zen Neon 2.

Although it's pretty small, you wouldn't want to carry the top-scoring RIVER T10 around with you all day in a shirt pocket or stuck in your jeans' waistband, because of its unusually bulky shape.

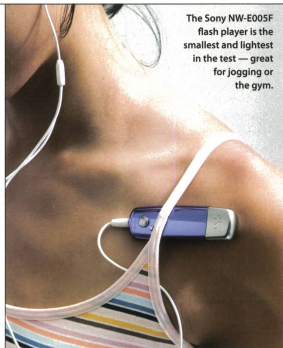
The SONY NW-E005F, looking a bit like a USB key, is incredibly small and weighs just 25 g, the lightest in the test (see the photo, below). It's probably the best of the lot to take jogging or to the gym, but no good if you're looking for larger, easy-to-use controls or a bigger screen to watch movies on. For that sort of thing, you're better off with a hard disc player with a larger screen. The latest screen of the hard disc players in the test belongs to >

IN A NUTSHELL

- We tested 17 digital music (MP3) players (10 flash and seven hard disc drive models), ranging in price from \$99 to \$699.
- Sound quality and battery life vary significantly between the players.

what to look for

- **Screen size** If you want to watch a video on your MP3 player or look at photos, a larger screen is most important. It'll also make navigating through your music collection easier.
- **Rechargeable battery** Some of the players in the test can be run on AA or AAA alkaline batteries that need replacing when they run out (or recharging, if you're using rechargeable ones). Others have a built-in Li-ion battery pack you can recharge from the USB port in your computer (some may require a USB cable for connection), from an AC adapter or from either source. Batteries generally charge more quickly from an AC adapter than a USB port. The table lists which players can still be used while they're recharging.
- **Memory** If you think it's limited for your purposes, check whether you can buy extra storage capacity in case you need it in future.
- **Compatibility** If you use a Mac or an older PC, check that it's compatible with the MP3 player.



The Sony NW-E005F flash player is the smallest and lightest in the test — great for jogging or the gym.



what to buy

The players are profiled in rank order within groups.

Flash

Of the players with flash memory, the top two deliver very good sound and stand out for battery life. While the IRIVER T10 has an excellent ease of use score, it's bulkier and heavier than the SAMSUNG YP-Z5FOB, which is more easily carried in a pocket and has a larger screen.

IRIVER T10

Price: \$199

Capacity: 2 GB

Good points

- Best battery life in the test (with an alkaline AA battery).
- Easy to rip and transfer music to the player.

Bad points

- No clear indication of which way the battery should be inserted.
- Navigation control isn't intuitive.
- The screen is reflective in sunlight.
- Relatively heavy for a flash drive player.



SAMSUNG YP-Z5FOB

Price: \$239

Capacity: 2 GB

Good points

- Second best battery life in the test (with a built-in rechargeable battery).
- Easy to rip and transfer music to the player.

Bad points

- Navigation controls are awkward and not intuitive.
- The screen is difficult to read in sunlight.
- No lanyard supplied.



Hard disc drive

The top-performing hard disc player (IRIVER E10) is very easy to use. In this group of players, it's the cheapest and has the longest battery life, but also the smallest capacity. And it scored lower for sound quality than the TOSHIBA GIGABEAT MES30V, which has a much larger capacity but is also bigger, heavier and more expensive.

IRIVER E10

Price: \$299

Capacity: 6 GB

Good points

- Easy to use.
- The smallest and lightest of the hard drive players in this test.
- Excellent score for battery life.

Bad points

- The display is very sensitive to the viewing angle and difficult to read in sunlight.
- No lanyard supplied.
- The smallest capacity of the hard drive players in this test.



TOSHIBA GIGABEAT MES30V

Price: \$399

Capacity: 30 GB

Good points

- Equal best sound score in the test.

Bad points

- The menu is a little slow to navigate as it offers lots of options for even simple tasks.
- The screen is reflective in sunlight.
- No lanyard supplied.



about the rest

Most of the remaining players performed pretty well overall; a few aspects worth noting are listed below. Exceptions are the LEGEND Jazz and LASER Pocket MVP-2G, both of which disappointed with very short battery life and lower sound quality scores.

Flash players

- You can buy extra memory for the SANDISK Sansa e250, but the player comes without music management software.
- The APPLE iPod Nano performed well, but is relatively slow to rip and transfer music.
- The menu of the CREATIVE Zen Neon 2 is less intuitive than most.
- With the CREATIVE Zen V Plus you need the backlight on to see the screen, which will run down the battery faster.
- The IRIVER Clix had the equal best sound score in the test and a bigger screen

than most other flash models tested, but it's difficult to read in sunlight.

- Weighing only 25 g, the SONY NW-E005F is the lightest flash player in the test, but some controls are very small and the display is difficult to read.

Hard disc drive players

- With the APPLE iPod you need the backlight on to read the display, and it's relatively slow to rip music.
- The COWON A2 and IAUDIO X5 both have a small but easy-to-use joystick, but transferring and managing files is overly complicated on both. The COWON A2 has a much larger screen than other models tested.
- The CREATIVE Zen Vision:M is bulky and heavy, and it's unnecessarily complicated to charge.
- The IRIVER H10 comes with a soft case that easily clips onto a belt. Its scroll control is difficult to use, though, and it scored lower for sound.

All but one of the MP3 players on test scored well for sound quality, and that's with the earbuds supplied — using them with good-quality headphones or good speakers is likely to improve the sound even further.

< the COWON A2. It looks eminently suitable for displaying photos or watching movies, but comes at a price: \$699, the most expensive in the test and the heaviest by far.

At the other end of the price scale, the \$99 LEGEND Jazz is the cheapest of the MP3 players tested, but it scored second-lowest overall, let down by a very short battery life of just four hours.

The verdict

All but one of the MP3 players on test scored relatively well (between 70% and 86%) for sound quality, and that's with the earbuds supplied — using them with good-quality headphones or good speakers is likely to improve the sound even further.

We've included the top-scoring two of each type in the *What to buy* list, but apart from the comparatively low-scoring LEGEND Jazz and LASER Pocket MVP-2G, any of the others scored well overall, so choose what suits you best. ■

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of the following:

- Ease of use: 40%
- Sound quality: 40%
- Battery life: 20%

Features See *What to look for*, page 36, for more on these.

Software supplied

All except the APPLES, SANDISK, LASER and LEGEND come with

some software for ripping, organising and transferring music, as well as other functions. The APPLES use iTunes, which can be downloaded free from the APPLE website.

File types supported If you want to use your MP3 player for other things than listening to music, check whether it supports the relevant file types

MODEL	PERFORMANCE					FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Battery life score (%)	Measured battery life (hours)	Recharge via USB	Battery number / type	Playback while recharging (AC / USB)	Mac-compatible*	FM radio	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Weight (g)	Capacity (GB)	Screen size (mm, W x H)
Flash														
Iriver T10	91	93	85	100	29.0		1 x AA		✓ (B)	✓	40 x 85 x 27	71	2	24 x 12
Samsung YP-Z5FQB	86	82	82	100	27.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion		✓ (B)	✓	90 x 43 x 12	58	2	28 x 35
SanDisk Sansa e250	85	86	81	89	17.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion			✓	88 x 43 x 14	74	2	29 x 36
Apple iPod Nano	83	76	86	90	17.5	✓	1 x Li-Ion (A)	- / ✓	✓		90 x 40 x 7	41	2	31 x 24
Creative Zen Neelon 2	83	82	77	99	24.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion (A)		✓ (B)	✓	80 x 42 x 13	49	2	29 x 29
Creative Zen V Plus	82	85	78	83	14.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion	✓ / -		✓	67 x 43 x 16	44	2	30 x 28
Iriver Clix	80	68	86	90	18.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion			✓	47 x 69 x 12	71	2	46 x 39
Sony NW-E005F	79	78	78	82	14.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion			✓	79 x 24 x 13	25	2	30 x 10
Legend Jazz	69	81	70	41	4.0		1 x AAA		✓ (B)		63 x 42 x 17	40	2	22 x 13
Laser Pocket MVP-2G	68	79	66	48	5.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	92 x 41 x 8	45	2	22 x 29
Hard disc drive														
Iriver E10	81	81	74	96	21.5	✓	1 x Li-Ion		✓ (B)	✓	96 x 45 x 15	76	6	28 x 28
Toshiba Gigabeat ME330V	80	79	86	72	10.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion	✓ / -		✓	101 x 60 x 13	123	30	39 x 50
Apple iPod	76	74	84	66	8.5	✓	1 x Li-Ion (A)	- / ✓	✓		104 x 62 x 12	130	30	53 x 40
Cowon A2	75	67	84	72	10.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion	✓ / ✓	✓ (B)	✓	79 x 134 x 23	302	30	89 x 52
Creative Zen Vision:M	75	67	86	70	9.5	✓	1 x Li-Ion	✓ / -		✓	104 x 61 x 19	160	30	51 x 39
Iriver H10	75	77	71	78	12.0	✓	1 x Li-Ion	✓ / -		✓	102 x 62 x 22	200	20	36 x 29
iAudio X5	74	68	85	65	8.0		1 x Li-Ion	✓ /	✓	✓	103 x 61 x 21	152	30	36 x 29



HOW WE TESTED

— see the list below. The most common file format for viewing photos from a digital camera is JPG.

- Music (audio): MP1, MP2, MP3, OGG, WMA, WAV, AAC, AIFF, Apple Lossless (MPEG4), ATRAC.
- Video: AVI, AMV, MOV, DivX, MJPG, XviD.
- Both music and video: ASF, SGI (Mac), SWF, M4V, MP4.
- Still images: BMP, JPG, GIF,

TIF, PICT (Mac), PNG.

Price Recommended retail as of November 2006.

* Except for the Apple products, functionality may be reduced compared with use on a Windows PC.

(A) Requires an AC adapter, which isn't supplied.

(B) No Mac OS specified, but our Mac could 'see' the player.

- Our testers checked how easy the players are to set up initially, to play back music on and to rip and transfer music files using software supplied, or Windows Media Player if none was supplied (iTunes for the iPods). They also evaluated their portability.
- They listened to each player with the earbuds supplied and carried out tests measuring frequency response, signal-to-noise ratio, total harmonic distortion and channel separation.
- To find out how long you can play music without recharging (or replacing) the battery, they measured the players' battery life. For this they first conditioned the rechargeable batteries by fully charging and discharging them three times and then ran the players at least twice until the batteries ran out. For models without a rechargeable battery, they installed a fresh alkaline battery and did the same.

System requirements	Supplied software	File types supported	Contact	Price (\$)
Win 98SE, ME, 2000 or XP	iriver Plus 2	ASF, MP3, OGG, WMA, BMP	www.iriver.com.au	199
Win 98SE, 2000 or XP	Samsung Media Studio 4.1	MP3, OGG, WMA, WAV, JPG	www.samsung.com	239
Win XP; Win Media Player 10	Sansa Media Converter 1.1 (for photos and video only)	MP3, WMA	www.sandisk.com	199
OS X 10.3.9, Win 2000 SP4 or Win XP SP2; iTunes 7	None	AA, AAC, AIFF, MP3, Apple Lossless (MPEG4), WAV, JPG, GIF, TIF, Pict (Mac), PNG, SGI (Mac), BMP	www.apple.com.au	219
Win XP SP1	Zen Neeon 2 Media Explorer, Windows Media Player 10	MP3, WAV, WMA, JPG, AVI	www.creative.com	200
Win XP SP1	Zen V Series Media Explorer R2, ZENcast Organizer, Creative MediaSource 5, Windows Media Player 10	MP3, WAV, WMA, JPG	www.creative.com	230
Win XP SP2, Win Media Player 10	Windows Media Player 11	ASF, MP3, OGG, WMA, JPG, AVI, SWF	www.iriver.com.au	259
Win 98SE, ME, 2000 Pro SP3, MCE or XP	SonicStage 3.4	ATRAC, MP3, WMA	www.sony.com.au	199
Not stated	None	MP3, WMA	www.legendmemory.com	99
OS X; Win 98SE, ME, 2000 or XP; Linux 2.4.2	None	ASF, MP3, WAV, WMA, GIF, JPG, AMV	www.laserco.net	199
Win 98SE, ME, 2000 or XP	iriver Plus 2	ASF, MP3, OGG, WMA, JPG, AVI, SWF	www.iriver.com.au	299
Win MCE or XP SP2	Windows Media Player 10, Windows Mobile Portable Media Centre 2.0	MP3, WAV, WMA, JPG, WMV	www.toshiba.com	399
OS X 10.3.9, Win 2000 SP4 or Win XP SP2; iTunes 7	None	AA, AAC, AIFF, MP3, Apple Lossless (MPEG4), WAV, JPG, GIF, TIF, Pict (Mac), PNG, SGI (Mac), BMP, M4V, MP4, MOV	www.apple.com.au	380
Win 98SE, 2000 or XP; DirectX 9; Windows Media Player 9, QuickTime 6	JetShell Pro 1.1 (file management), JetAudio VX 1.1 (audio management), Win98 USB drivers	MP3, OGG, WAV, WMA, BMP, JPG, PNG, DivX, WMV, XviD	www.cowonglobal.com	699
Win XP SP1	Zen Vision:M Media Explorer, Creative MediaSource 3.30.35, Windows Media Player 10	MP3, WAV, WMA, JPG, AVI, DivX, MJPG, MP1, MP2, MP4, WMV, XviD	www.creative.com	390
Win XP	Windows Media Player 10	MP3, WMA, JPG	www.iriver.com.au	329
OS X; Win 98SE, 2000, ME or XP; Linux 2.2	JetShell Pro 3.20 (file management), JetAudio VX 6.1 (audio management), Win98 USB drivers	ASF, MP3, OGG, WAV, WMA, JPG, MP4	www.cowonglobal.com	429

A grater for everything

Graters are nifty gadgets no kitchen should be without. They can help you just as much with preparing the ingredients for an elaborate meal as with perfecting the finishing touches.

A grater with a coarse blade is ideal for grating apples for pie or chocolate for dessert. One with a fine blade grates parmesan for pasta or ginger for curry. A slicing blade lets you create even slices of cucumber for salad or potato for bakes, and with the prickly-looking grinding blade you can grind nutmeg or produce citrus peel for a tart.

But how many graters do you need for all those tasks? Is an all-purpose grater with multiple blades all you need, or is it better to have individual ones for specific jobs?

To find out we bought a selection of 37 kitchen graters of various types and put them through their paces — see *How we tested*, page 43, for more on this. Twelve made it into the *What to buy* list and are pictured on the right.

Which type?

- **Hard cheese graters** are conveniently sized and fit neatly into your hand. They're designed so you can also use them at the table and let you grate hard cheese such as parmesan either into an attached container or straight over your meal as you need it. Because of their fairly fine

grating blade, they're less suitable for softer cheese like cheddar, which could easily clog the blade.

- **All-purpose box graters** are the most versatile and the type you'd use for grating larger quantities of food if you have no food processor or can't be bothered assembling and then washing it. They have at least two (though often four) large surfaces, with a number of different grating blades in the one utensil for grating coarsely and finely, slicing and grinding. Some come with an attached storage container to grate the food into; others have a base for that purpose or simply collect the grated food in the middle while you rest them on a cutting board or benchtop.

- **Flat graters** are ideal for grating smaller quantities of food while cooking — just a little parmesan into the risotto, for example, or a bit of garlic and ginger into the stir-fry. They're generally pretty lightweight, easy to hold and to clean, and take up little room in a utensils drawer.

- **Rotary graters** tend to be fiddly to assemble and to clean but are convenient for grating nuts, spices or pieces of chocolate, because you don't have to risk your fingertips while grating — these foods (and pieces of hard cheese like parmesan) fit easily into their small cavity, where they're firmly held in place.

IN A NUTSHELL

- A versatile box grater may be all you need in the kitchen, but lovers of kitchen gadgets will find a use for lots of different kinds.
- We tested 37 graters of four types. Most grated well, but not all made the job easy.



what to look for

In general

- Strong construction.
- Few crevices for easier cleaning.
- Few attachments for easy storage, assembly and disassembly.

Hard cheese graters

- A fine, sharp blade that can be removed easily from the container.
- A good-sized container underneath the blade area.
- Stability when grating on the bench.

All-purpose box graters

- Four types of blade (for coarse and fine grating, slicing and grinding), all slightly angled, and the prickly-looking grinding blade not too small.
- A large, comfortable handle positioned away from the blade area.
- Non-slip rubber feet or surface around the base to help stabilise the grater.
- Good-sized cavity to prevent clogging.

Flat graters

- No more than two blade types on one surface. (The three blade types on the AVANTI and DALSON are too small and close to each other to use comfortably.)
- Long and flat (or slightly convex) blade area for a smooth action.
- Two-way action grates faster.
- A non-slip end to rest on the bench while grating.
- Safety cover for storage to protect blades (and fingers).

Rotary graters

- Strong construction.
- Comfortable handle.
- Good-sized cavity.

Is an all-purpose grater all you need, or is it better to have individual graters for specific jobs?

Caution: sharp!

Grating food requires the same degree of caution as cutting meat, filleting fish or any other food preparation work that involves a sharp implement. The razor-sharp, two-way grating blades — especially on the CUISIPRO ACCUTEC and MICROPLANE flat graters, which claim to shave food rather than ripping and shredding it apart — can easily shave the top off your knuckles too, if you're careless or grate slippery food right down to the end. For some flat graters you can buy a protective cover or grating guard.

Dishwasher-safe

Except for the NIGELLA LAWSON hard cheese grater (which isn't suitable for the dishwasher because its egg-shaped top is made of beech wood), we washed all tested graters in a dishwasher. Only the DALSON showed some rust afterwards, although it was labelled 'dishwasher-safe'. In general, this label just indicates the item's made of stainless steel — it's no guarantee that it won't rust, eventually, or its blades won't deteriorate. For more on this topic, see the Choice Cut on cutlery rusting in the dishwasher in the Jan/Feb 2007 issue, page 6. >



WHAT TO BUY

Hard cheese graters

1 BODUM PARMA CHEESE GRATER 3277	\$19.95
2 ALESSI PARMENIDE GRATER RED AARU01 R / BLUE AARU01 AZ	\$34.95

All-purpose box graters

3 OXO GOOD GRIPS MULTI GRATER 32780*	\$16.95
4 BREVILLE BOX GRATER 4 FACE POWDER PINK BRE-322	\$22.45
5 ETERNA 4 SIDED GRATER 13640	\$14.95

Flat graters

6 MICROPLANE COARSE GRATER	\$39.95**
7 MICROPLANE FINE GRATER	\$39.95**
8 CUISIPRO ACCUTEC FINE GRATER 746878	\$39.95**
9 MICROPLANE MEDIUM RIBBON GRATER	\$39.95**
10 ZYLISS CONTOUR GRATER 71375	\$18.95

Rotary graters

11 ZYLISS ALL CHEESE GRATER 11355	\$42.95
12 AVANTI CHEESE GRATER S-552	\$16.95

* The Oxo has only two grating surfaces, so is slightly less versatile than some other box graters.

** The Microplane graters are razor-sharp and are best used with a slider attachment that sells separately for \$17.95 (code 35037). The equally sharp Cuisipro comes with a slider.



Can they grate parmesan cheese and chocolate without clogging the blade? Can they zest a lime leaving the pith on the fruit? Will they take the top off your finger while grating nutmeg?

MODEL	PERFORMANCE			SUITABLE FOR					
	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Hard cheese	Soft cheese	Hard vegetables	Chocolate	Zest	Spices
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)									
Hard cheese graters									
Bodum Parma Cheese Grater 3277	84	100	74	✓✓			S	S	
Alessi Parmenide Grater Red AARU01 R / Blue AARU01 AZ	81	100	68	✓✓			S	S	
Avanti Cheese Bug 12768	77	100	62	✓✓			S		
Nigella Lawson's Living Kitchen Parmesan Grater	76	100	60	✓✓					
All-purpose box graters									
Oxo Good Grips Multi Grater 32780	85	95	78	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		
Breville Box Grater 4 Face Powder Pink BRE-322	81	88	76	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Eterna 4 Sided Grater 13640	81	88	76	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Chef Inox Multi Grater with Base 7351	80	89	74	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		
Vue 4 Sided Box Grater AD-HK	80	89	74	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		
Oxo Good Grips Box Grater (with storage container) 1057961	79	93	70	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Cuisipro 6 Sided Grater with Base S/S	77	88	70	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Eterna Triangular S/S Grater with Santoprene Handle 13641	77	88	70	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Propert Deluxe Box Grater with Container 7310	76	84	70	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Davis and Waddell 4 Sided Grater D1000	69	76	64	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Stixx Suctionware Grater 1009	69	88	56	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓		
Avanti Triangular S/S Grater 12769	61	71	54	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Flat graters									
Microplane Coarse Grater (A)	88	100	80	✓✓			✓✓	S	
Microplane Fine Grater (A)	88	100	80	S			S	✓✓	S
Cuisipro Accutec Fine Grater with Protective Cover 746878	87	100	78	✓✓			S	✓✓	✓✓
Microplane Medium Ribbon Grater (A)	86	95	80	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	S	✓✓
Zyliss Contour Grater 71375	82	88	78	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Wiltshire SS Round Handle Grater W3024	78	88	72				S	✓	✓✓
Anolon Grater with Suregrip Handle 52265-C	77	75	78	✓✓			✓✓		
Chef Inox Como Flat Grater	77	75	78	✓✓			✓✓	✓	✓✓
Ecko 123 Flat Grater 1067064	77	75	78	✓✓			S	✓	✓✓
Oxo Softworks Grater 80551	77	75	78	✓✓				✓✓	✓
Avanti Non Slip Universal Grater 12772	67	69	66	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	
Tefal 33163112	66	75	60	✓✓				✓	✓✓
Borner Twin Design-Line Grater Fine and Coarse (plastic)	62	56	66	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓		
Dalson Non Stick Grater KG 12210	61	69	56	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	
Rotary graters									
Zyliss All Cheese Grater 11355 (Drum)	74	94	60	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓
Avanti Cheese Grater S-552	73	92	60	✓✓			✓✓		✓✓
Cuisipro Accutec Rotary Grater 74678400	69	92	54	✓✓			✓✓		✓✓
Zyliss Classic Cheese Grater 11370	66	83	54	✓✓			✓✓		✓✓
Culinaire 3 Drum Food Mill Grates Shreds and Slices C12002	60	75	50	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓
Avanti Drum Cheese Grater 15959	59	75	48	✓✓					
Davis & Waddell Mini Multi Grater 3 Drum Stainless Steel D86063	55	63	50	✓✓		✓	✓✓		

BUYING INFORMATION

	Price (\$)
2 9482 6666	19.95
www.gcv.com.au	34.95
2 9482 6666	21.95
www.anasazihome.com	59.95
www.oxo.com	16.95
www.breville.com.au	22.45
www.mcpher.com.au	14.95
www.chefinox.com.au	24.95
2 9238 9111	18.70
www.oxo.com	34.95
www.zimba.com.au	29.95
www.mcpher.com.au	14.95
www.property.com.au	14.95
www.albi.com.au	16.95
2 8542 0000	29.95
2 9482 6666	9.95
2 9851 2400	39.95 (A)
2 9851 2400	39.95 (A)
www.zimba.com.au	39.95
2 9851 2400	39.95 (A)
www.zylliss.com	18.95
www.mcpher.com.au	5.00
www.cookwarebrands.com.au	22.95
www.chefinox.com.au	7.95
www.worldkitchen.com	4.95
www.oxo.com	7.00
2 9482 6666	19.95
www.tefal.co.uk	12.95
www.cambur.com.au	15.00
www.dalsonware.com.au	4.40
www.zylliss.com	42.95
2 9482 6666	16.95
www.zimba.com.au	39.95
www.zylliss.com	25.95
2 9851 2400	19.95
2 9482 6666	29.95
www.albi.com.au	12.95

For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the graters for use by people with a hand weakness, vision problem or cognitive impairment.

All graters she recommended are in the *What to buy* list. Other relevant characteristics are highlighted below.

- Of the **hard cheese graters**, the top-scoring BODUM Parma Cheese Grater (below) can be stabilised with a clamp and is ideal for one-handed use.
- The OXO GOOD GRIPS Multi Grater is the all-purpose **box grater** of choice because it can be adapted to different angles for better action or hooked over a bowl.
- Of the **flat graters**, the ZYLISS Contour Grater is the most suitable, but the three MICROPLANE graters used with their safety guard can also be recommended because they require little hand pressure.
- **Rotary graters** are generally less suitable for some people because they require strength in both hands.



USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Performance: 40%
- Ease of use: 60%

Suitable for

✓ Recommended for this type of food and performed well in our tests.

✓ Recommended for this type of food, but performed less well in our tests.

✗ Not recommended for or tested with, but suitable for this type of food.

Price: Recommended retail as of December 2006 or what we paid in August/September 2006.

(A) The Microplane graters are razor sharp and are best used with a slider attachment that sells separately for \$17.95 (code 35037). The equally sharp Cuisipro comes with a slider.



HOW WE TESTED

- Smartly protected with a stainless steel mesh (butcher's) glove, our home economist spent days on end putting the 37 graters through their paces to find out which of them do a good job grating hard and soft foods. Can they grate parmesan cheese and chocolate without clogging the blade? Can they zest a lime leaving the pith on the fruit? Will they take the top off your fingers while grating nutmeg? She tested the graters on the foods they're meant for and also indicated if they could do more jobs than just those they're recommended for.
- She also assessed their general comfort and grip, versatility and ease of cleaning, as well as the quality of the grated food they produced.

HEALTH check

Safe travels

Sound health advice is vital, particularly when travelling to exotic locations, but travellers may not be getting it from their travel agent, reports the January/February issue of *CHOICE Health Reader*.

Swiss researchers assessed the findings of an investigator posing as a tourist wanting to book a holiday to Kenya — a country where malaria is rife. They found that in more than half the consultations with accredited travel agents, no health advice was given spontaneously. The study, published in the *Journal of Travel Medicine*, reported that after prompting, 99% of travel agents mentioned that Kenya was indeed an area of high malaria risk. But a fifth of all travel agents neither mentioned malaria spontaneously nor recommended seeking health advice elsewhere.

While these findings aren't necessarily indicative of Australian travel agents, *Health Reader* suggests that impending holidaymakers should be extra-vigilant and seek independent advice on the particular health risks of different countries. Useful web resources for health and travel advice include The Department of Foreign Affairs (www.smarttraveller.gov.au) and the Australian Travellers Medical and Vaccination Centre (www.tmvcc.com.au).

Also in January/February *Health Reader*:

- A Cochrane review of 25 studies of the effectiveness of tooth-whitening products sold over-the-counter or dispensed by dentists has concluded that there's some merit in these products. But it stresses that people should be aware of side effects, such as tooth sensitivity and irritated gums. There's also a question mark about whether they're safe to use over the long term.
 - It's not just adults who benefit from cutting back on salt in their diet. UK researchers analysed scientific studies looking at the impact of reduced salt intake in children and found that a modest reduction caused significant falls in blood pressure. If continued from childhood it may well lessen the rise in blood pressure — and the associated increase in heart disease — with age.
- If you'd like to subscribe to *CHOICE Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free, or go to choice.com.au/magazines.

FIGHTING CERVICAL CANCER

From April this year all 12- and 13-year-old girls will be eligible for an ongoing school-based immunisation program that aims to reduce the incidence of cervical cancer in Australian women.

The vaccine, Gardasil, prevents infection from the strains of human papillomavirus (HPV) that cause around 70% of all cervical cancers. It's administered as a series of three injections over a period of seven months, so the immunisation program needs to run over a whole school year.

The Commonwealth Government is also funding two-year catch-up immunisation programs for 13-18-year-old girls in a largely school-based program (also starting in April 2007); and another, for women up to and including 26 years of age who are no longer at school, in a community-based program delivered through general practice (from mid 2007).

Girls and women aged 13-26 can get the vaccine through their GPs before the programs start, but they'll need to pay the full price, which for a three-injection course is about \$460.

Gardasil isn't available to women older than 26 due to a lack of safety and efficacy data for this age group, so if this is you, regular Pap smears (every two years) are still the best way to avoid cervical cancer. And Pap smears are still recommended for all women aged 18 to 69 who have ever been sexually active, even if they've been vaccinated.

Out with the old ...

When did you last clean out your medicine cabinet? If it's been a while, you might want to give it a go — in doing so you'll be supporting the efforts of the Return Unwanted Medicines (RUM) project, which was set up in 1998 to facilitate the collection and disposal of unwanted and out-of-date medicines from the Australian community.

An ancient pack of paracetamol or a half-finished foil of your previous blood pressure medication might seem relatively innocuous. But keeping medicines that are no longer needed or out-of-date can be an invitation for confusion and misuse, which can have serious health implications. Accidental poisoning is a real risk with curious children around. And older people, who are the biggest consumers of prescription medicines and have a tendency to accumulate medicines, are particularly vulnerable.

So help reduce the risk of medication error and child poisoning by taking medicines properly, conducting a regular audit of your medicine cabinet and removing those items no longer needed.

To help with the safe disposal of medication the RUM project provides every pharmacy in Australia with collection bins, meaning you can dispose of unwanted medicines at 'any pharmacy, any time' (as the RUM catch-phrase goes). All medicines collected are disposed of using the most effective and environmentally friendly methods. Over 300 tonnes of unwanted medicines are collected in these bins each year.

Not only is this a good way to ensure safety at home, it's also a great way to help do your bit for your local environment — it's a better alternative to throwing old medicines in rubbish bins or flushing them down sinks and toilets, where they can end up in our waterways.



ISTOCK RF

Cut to shreds

test

The increase in cases of identity theft and fraud in recent years has led to a greater awareness of the need to protect personal information. Paper shredders allow you to cut up documents containing personal details, such as bills and account statements, before you throw them away. But with the variety of shredders available (not to mention the big differences in price), it's hard to know which one to buy.

Our test found that paying more for a shredder won't necessarily guarantee you greater security. While a few of the pricier models worked better, but there were a couple also performed well for only a fraction of the price.

Strip-cut or cross-cut?

On test were nine cross-cut and six strip-cut home shredders costing between \$30 and \$200. Overall the cross-cut models worked better, but there were a couple of standout strip-cut models.

Strip-cut shredders cut A4 paper lengthways into 6–7 mm wide strips. Cross-cut shredders cut it into much smaller pieces (around 22–50 mm long and 4 mm wide) and are regarded as being more secure.

While two of our top performers are strip-cut models, the other strip-cuts we tested didn't fare so well. The bottom three models (all strip-cut) often left relatively large strips of paper uncut if the paper wasn't fed squarely into the centre of the slot.

If you want to shred your old credit cards a cross-cut model is probably the best bet. A strip-cut model may be capable of shredding a card, but if you feed it in lengthways, the number could be left intact on the strip.

All the shredders tested should only be used continuously for 2–10 minutes at a time. The shredder then has to be rested for between four and 30 minutes. Some shredders also have limits on the maximum number of sheets of paper shredded per day.

Be safety-conscious

Paper shredders are potentially very dangerous devices and should be used with care. One of the biggest concerns is the possibility of children touching the shredder's blades. We used two probes (one the size of the finger of a child aged over three and the other of a child under three) to see if either could fit into the feed slot. The over-three finger didn't fit into any of the slots but the under-three one could fit into the feed slot and reach the blades of three of the strip-cut models: the FELLOWES Safe Shred SC5+, OFFICE ONE V5502SB and TDE SYSTEMS SC103.



HOW WE TESTED

- For the performance score, our testers ploughed through piles of used A4 office paper, timing how long it took for each shredder to shred one sheet and then multiple sheets of paper.
- They measured the size of cut sections and assessed the quality of the cut (including whether any sections of paper were left uncut).
- If a shredder claimed to be able to shred credit cards (and in one case CDs) or paper with staples they tested that too. In fact they tested on stapled paper unless a model's instructions warned not to.
- They also measured how noisy the shredders are.
- Just as importantly, our testers also looked at how easy the shredders are to use and empty, as well as whether they're safe.

If you have small children and/or pets it's a good idea to keep your shredder off the floor, look for a model with a safety lock on the controls and ideally unplug it when you're not using it. In this test two of the FELLOWES models — the P45-C and P-55C — have a safety lock. Don't let children operate the shredder, even under adult supervision.

Also make sure the shredder has an 'off' switch. One model in the test (HSM S10) doesn't, so unless you switch it off at the power point it'll start as soon as something is placed into the feed slot. We suggest you choose the HSM S10 only if it's easy to reach your power point to turn the shredder off.

And keep neckties and long hair well away from the feed slot. >

PAPER SHREDDERS

IN A NUTSHELL

- You don't need to pay a fortune for a good-quality shredder to use at home. Our Best Buy works just as well as some other models three times the price.
- Some shredders are very heavy, and it can be difficult to remove the cutting head to empty the bin.



WHAT TO BUY

FELLOWES P50CM (cross-cut)	\$130
HSM S10 (strip-cut)	\$149
REXEL V50 (strip-cut)	\$149
OFFICE ONE V5502C (cross-cut)	BEST BUY \$50

PHOTOS: GENE ROSS



profiles

The models in the Whot to buy list are profiled in rank order.

**FELLOWES P50CM**

Price: \$130 **Type:** Cross-cut

Good points

- The fastest model in the test for shredding a single sheet of paper.
- Can shred stapled paper.

Bad points

- It has a mesh bin instead of a solid plastic one, so paper dust can spill out the sides unless you use a plastic bag or special liners (sold separately), which don't do much for the shredder's looks.
- One of the noisiest models tested.

**HSM S10**

Price: \$149 **Type:** Strip-cut

Good points

- Highest performance score.
- The second fastest model tested to shred 100 sheets of paper.

Bad points

- It doesn't have an 'off' switch, which means it's always in auto-feed mode unless you switch it off at the power point — not great for safety.
- The controls are small and difficult to operate and the labels are small.

**REXEL V50**

Price: \$149 **Type:** Strip-cut

Good points

- The fastest in the test to shred 100 sheets of paper.

Bad points

- It's very difficult to grip the head and remove it when emptying the bin.
- It can be a little difficult to get the shredder to start when you're feeding in multiple sheets of paper.
- Noisy.

**OFFICE ONE VS502C**

Price: \$50 **Type:** Cross-cut

Good points

- Good overall score and much cheaper than the top three models.
- Can shred credit cards and stapled paper.

Bad points

- Nothing in particular.



about the rest

- The cross-cut FELLOWES Powershred P-45C, P-55C and PS-62C all work well but you'd want to find them for a good price. Our Best Buy (OFFICE ONE VS502C) scored equally well overall and is considerably cheaper. The PS-62C is very stable and it's very easy to empty its slide-out bin, but some paper shreds are likely to accumulate in the compartment housing the bin. The P-45C and P-55C both have a safety lock on the controls, but the P-45C is the slowest in the test to shred 100 sheets, and the P-55C is relatively heavy.
- The OFFICE ONE CD Combo (cross-cut) is the only model in the test with a separate slot to destroy CDs. It doesn't shred the disc but embeds a series of dotted lines onto its surface to make it unreadable. We found it very quick and effective at doing this.
- The REXEL V55 and HSM X5 (both cross-cut) worked well but were let down by their lower ease of use scores. The controls on the HSM are small and can be hard to use and the REXEL has a heavy head that can be difficult to remove.
- The TDE SYSTEMS SC103 (strip-cut) and XC203 (cross-cut) have similar scores but there's a big price difference between the two. The SC103 is much cheaper but it failed one of the safety tests, which is a concern if you have small children (see *Be safety-conscious*, page 45).
- The strip-cut FELLOWES Safe Shred SC5+ and OFFICE ONE VS502SB both failed one of the safety tests and were the poorest performers in the test. They leave relatively large strips of paper uncut if you don't feed it into the centre of the slot. The LEDAH C-10Eco also has this problem.

MODEL		PERFORMANCE	
Brand / model (in rank order)	Type	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)
Fellowes P50CM	Cross-cut	76	81
HSM S10	Strip-cut	75	87
Rexel V50	Strip-cut	75	86
Fellowes Powershred P-45C	Cross-cut	74	74
Fellowes Powershred P-55C (A)	Cross-cut	74	78
Fellowes Powershred PS-62C	Cross-cut	74	67
Office One CD Combo VS710CD	Cross-cut	74	80
Office One VS502C	Cross-cut	74	77
Rexel V55	Cross-cut	72	79
TDE Systems SC103	Strip-cut	72	70
TDE Systems XC203	Cross-cut	72	69
HSM X5	Cross-cut	70	77
Ledah C-10Eco	Strip-cut	64	62
Fellowes Safe Shred SC5+	Strip-cut	63	66
Office One VS502SB	Strip-cut	63	66

- If you're concerned about higher security go for a cross-cut rather than a strip-cut shredder.
- Controls should be easy to use and well labelled.
- Controls should include **auto-start** (where the shredder starts when something is placed in the feed slot), **reverse** (for freeing jams) and **off** positions.
- If you have children, look for a shredder with a safety lock on the controls (right).
- Check how easy it is to remove the cutting head to empty the bin. We found some were heavy and difficult to grip.
- Strip-cut models will need their bin emptied more often than cross-cut ones because they produce bigger strips.
- Check whether the shredder is stable. We found some were very easily knocked over.



				FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS						
Edge cut test score (%)	Time to process 100 sheets (sec)	Noise shredding one sheet (dB)		Shred credit cards	Shred staples	Destroy CD	Max. sheets per pass	Duty cycle (on / off, minutes)	Dimensions (H x W x D, mm)	Weight (kg)	Contact		Price (\$)
90	96	82			✓		5	3-4 / 15	390 x 325 x 190	4.6	www.fellowes.com		130
93	71	75			ns		10	3 / ns	400 x 330 x 205	3.1	www.masterbind.com.au		149
93	56	80			ns		10	2 / 4	440 x 340 x 265	4.5	www.acco.com.au		149
70	133	79		✓	✓		6	5-7 / 20	365 x 355 x 265	5.1	www.fellowes.com		130
70	104	76		✓	✓		8	5-7 / 20	400 x 380 x 280	6.5	www.fellowes.com		170
80	132	70		✓	✓		6	10 / 20	330 x 210 x 410	6.8	www.fellowes.com		205
68	93	79		✓		✓	7	3 / 30	370 x 325 x 220	4.6	03 9829 3111		129
70	112	76		✓	ns		5	3 / 30	365 x 320 x 170	3.4	03 9829 3111		50
65	102	83			ns		6	2 / 4	440 x 340 x 265	6.3	www.acco.com.au		169
73	90	70					7	2 / 20	370 x 310 x 175	2.8	02 9518 1600		30
75	104	73		✓			10	2 / 20	400 x 365 x 235	6.5	02 9518 1600		79
63	118	77			ns		5	3 / ns	400 x 330 x 205	3.7	www.masterbind.com.au		149
65	104	75					5	2 / 4	365 x 315 x 175	2.2	www.bantex.com.au		50
60	80	83			✓		5	3-5 / 15	370 x 330 x 195	2.0	www.fellowes.com		45
60	92	80					5	3 / 30	345 x 285 x 145	1.8	03 9829 3111		30

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Performance: 50%
- Ease of use: 50%

See *How we tested*, page 45.

Duty cycle (on/off, minutes)

Shredders shouldn't be used continuously for long periods. This is the maximum number of minutes the manufacturer recommends using the shredder, followed by the number of minutes for which it should be rested.

Price Recommended retail as of October 2006.

ns Not stated.

(A) To be replaced in March by a new model with 'Safe Sense' technology that's claimed to stop the machine if a finger touches the blade.



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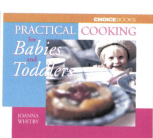
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Spinning around

test

WASHING MACHINES

We tested seven front-loading and eleven top-loading washing machines, ranging in price from \$749 to \$2999. We used a new test method with a cold-water (20°C) wash instead of warm water.

According to 2005 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 70% of Australians use cold water in their washing machines, and CHOICE's own 2006 survey similarly found that 55% of subscribers use a cold-wash program in their homes. So we decided it was time to change our testing to better reflect consumer habits.

A major effect of washing in cold water is that the machines use a lot less energy, as they don't have to heat the water (or your hot water system doesn't have to do it for them). So energy efficiency is no longer considered in the overall score.

We've also added a new rinse performance test (see *How we tested*, page 51), which has had the effect of knocking front loaders off their dominant perch as overall top scorers. They still beat top loaders for gentleness and spin efficiency, but they tend to lose points for rinse effectiveness because they generally use less water. Front and top loaders are now mixed from top to bottom of the scores (see the table, page 54) instead of all front loaders being at the top.

Rinse performance vs water efficiency

It's not hard to see why there tends to be a trade-off between rinse effectiveness and water efficiency. The

reason the rinse test was included in the Australian standard is directly related to the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) scheme that's been a requirement for washing machines since July 2006. Its six-star rating system encourages manufacturers to make their machines more water-efficient in order to display more stars on the label (see page 51). The rinse effectiveness test that they also now have to pass is intended to prevent them from gaining water efficiency at the expense of leaving dirt and detergent in your clothes.

Machines that use a lot of water (most top loaders) tend to rinse extremely well, removing nearly all traces of dirt and washing detergent, while water-efficient machines (the majority of front loaders) tend to compromise the overall rinse performance.

The ELECTROLUX Ultra Silencer EWF1495 is the only machine tested that seems to do both very well, having very good water efficiency as well as very good overall rinse performance. So it can be done. But when you're shopping for your next washing machine you'll only be able to see from the label whether a machine is water-efficient, not the degree to which it compromises rinse performance to achieve this; you need our tests for that.

Nanotechnology?

Both the LG Fuzzy Logic Turbodrum WF-T656 and the SAMSUNG Silver Nano J1455AV claim to use nanotechnology, which is the manipulation and use >

IN A NUTSHELL

- To match what most consumers do these days, we now test machines on a cold-water wash.
- Low water use and rinse effectiveness: It's rare to find a machine that does both well.



WHAT TO BUY

Best Buy indicates a model that is a reasonable performer in its size range and whose combined purchase price and running costs are comparatively low. However, we don't call a washing machine a **Best Buy** unless we also have information about the brand's reliability.

The other models are the top performers overall in their size bracket, but they won't be as cheap to buy and/or run as **Best Buys**. We've included top and front loaders in each size range in the *What to buy* list.

(fr) = front loader (tp) = top loader

Small (up to 5.5 kg)

MIELE Novotronic WS02 (fr)	\$1699
FISHER & PAYKEL MWS12 (tp)	BEST BUY \$749
FISHER & PAYKEL GWS12 (tp)	\$859

Medium (6–7 kg)

BOSCH Maxx Lifestyle Exclusive WAE26470 (fr)	BEST BUY \$1499
FISHER & PAYKEL GW612 (tp)	BEST BUY \$995
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW712 (tp)	\$1149
MIELE Honeycomb Care W1213 (fr)	
(discontinued but should be available in some shops)	\$2999

Large (7.5 kg or more)

ELECTROLUX Ultra Silencer EWF1495 (fr)	\$1689
LG Inverter WD-1238C (fr)	BEST BUY \$1249
FISHER & PAYKEL Aquasmart WL80T65CW1 (tp)	BEST BUY \$1199
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW812 (tp)	\$1179

We've added a new rinse performance test, which has knocked front loaders off their dominant perch as overall top scorers. They still beat top loaders for spin efficiency and gentleness but tend to lose points for rinse effectiveness because they generally use less water.



< of matter at the nano scale — that is, at atomic or molecular levels. Nanoparticles are used in products such as self-cleaning windows and long-lasting paints, and silver nano particles are also thought to effectively fight bacteria and fungi, which is why whitegoods manufacturers are jumping on the bandwagon.

Looking for specific claims, though, we could find no explanation of what the nanotechnology is supposed to achieve for the LG machine, either on the LG website or in the product manual. On the SAMSUNG website it's claimed that during the cold-water 'silver wash', 400 billion nano-sized silver ions are injected into the fabric, which creates an anti-bacterial 'coating' on your clothing.

At CHOICE we'd like to know if manufacturers are addressing a real problem, or is it just a marketing gimmick? How much research has been done? When asked to explain the reasoning behind the inclusion of nanotechnology in its washing machine, SAMSUNG reiterated the benefits of bacterial-fighting properties, but didn't give us any evidence of whether there's really a problem with bacteria in washing machines.

The use of nanotechnology in everyday products is of concern anyway, because so far there's been very little research into the potential risks to health and the environment of the widespread use of nanoparticles — yet the use of nanotechnology seems to be going ahead regardless.

According to several sources, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently announced that it will regulate as pesticides products that incorporate nano silver and make antimicrobial claims, although we

haven't heard EPA confirmation yet. Under the regulation, manufacturers would be required to provide evidence that their nanoproducts don't harm environmental systems or human health before they can be marketed commercially.

In response, Friends of the Earth in Australia has called on SAMSUNG to recall its Nano Silver range from sale until peer-reviewed studies can demonstrate its safety for the environment and health.

Yellow stains

During testing we discovered that at the beginning of the wash, all six FISHER & PAYKEL machines deposited a yellow stain on the washing. FISHER & PAYKEL's investigators traced the problem back to the machines' supply hoses — they were leaching a substance onto the clothes. The colour was more intense if the machine hadn't been used for a day or more, and was chiefly noticeable in an all-white, cold-water load — it washed out easily in warm water and detergent.

The problem was rectified by switching hoses. FISHER & PAYKEL says it's yet to receive any complaints about this problem, and our testing has since shown WESTINGHOUSE, SIMPSON (both made by ELECTROLUX) and HAIER machines all exhibit some yellowing too, though not to the same extent. ELECTROLUX says it's changing hose supplier and all models will have new hoses by mid 2007.

If you notice any new yellow stains on your washing and find it a problem (if they haven't washed out by the end of the wash, for example), we suggest you contact the washing machine manufacturer and also mention CHOICE's findings; contact details are in the table, page 55. >

For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the newly tested washing machines with varying types of disability in mind. We've only included washing machines from our *What to buy* list.

- If you're a wheelchair user, an elevated front-loading machine will give you the best access, and most front loaders now have a 180° door opening, which makes loading easier. The ELECTROLUX Ultra Silencer, when raised off the ground, would be particularly suitable, as it's easy to reach into, clean and maintain and has easily accessible controls.
- If you have an upper limb dysfunction, look for a machine with pushbutton controls or large, easy-to-turn knobs. Front loaders are generally easier to reach into for those with shoulder problems and

also feature easy-to-access front controls. The LG Inverter is a good overall choice as it offers handy raised rubber grips on the program dial and has easily accessible detergent dispensers.

- For those with vision impairment, the FISHER & PAYKEL MW512, GW512 and GW612 feature raised, white controls on a dark grey panel for easier identification. They also alert the user with a different-pitched beep at the top and bottom of the control range.
- Simple-to-comprehend control panels are useful for those with a cognitive impairment, with most of the machines tested offering too much information to be easily understood. The ELECTROLUX Ultra Silencer, FISHER & PAYKEL MW512, GW512 and GW612 have an easy two-step washing process and are clearly labelled for ease of use.



HOW WE TESTED

- To see how much dirt the machines remove, our testers pin specially soiled swatches onto a standard load of washing and measure how much light is reflected from them before and after washing in cold water and a standard detergent. The more light, the cleaner the machine has washed the swatch.
- To find out how gentle a machine is, they attach swatches of easily frayed fabric to the wash load and measure the unfrayed area before and after the wash.
- To check the spin efficiency, they weigh the clothes before and after the wash to see how much water is left in them.
- To determine rinse performance — how well the machines keep the dirt suspended in the water rather than depositing it back on the clothes, and how well they rinse out the detergent — our testers add a marker chemical to the wash. At the end, they take a sample of the water remaining in the clothes to determine the amount of chemical that's left — the less there is, the better the rinse.
- The score for water efficiency is achieved by measuring the amount of water used in a cycle (on a normal wash program). The score is based on how much water is used for each kilogram of washing — the less the better.



what to look for

- **Capacity** You can buy washing machines for wash loads from 4.5 kg to 10 kg, so you can find one to suit any size of household. While larger machines are great for big households or bulky loads, the real trick is figuring out whether the machine can really wash the recommended capacity — something you can't tell just by looking inside. Because we test wash performance according to the machine's recommended maximum capacity, if our tests show its wash performance isn't good, that could indicate its capacity was exaggerated. If a machine is very tightly packed the clothes often can't move around enough to achieve a good wash.
- **Time savers** Generally, top loaders have shorter wash cycles than front loaders, but there's an increasing number of front loaders with faster normal cycles and/or quick wash options.
- **Ease of use** When you're shopping around, ask yourself the following:
 - Is the labelling on the controls clear?
 - Is the program selection straightforward and intuitive to set?
 - Is the lint filter easy to clean?
 - Are the detergent and fabric softener dispensers easy to use?
 - Is the door/lid opening large and does it open far enough?
- **Space** if you're short of space you can stand a dryer on top of most front loaders.
- **Noise** Some machines are loud. If your laundry's close to your living areas this can be a problem, so look at the comparative noise ratings in the table. Generally, due to their faster spin speed, front loaders tend to have a higher pitch than top loaders.

- **Hot and cold water connections** Some machines need both hot and cold water to operate; others can connect to cold water only and might need a special connector or sealing cap for the hot-water inlet. A machine with a heater (front loaders only) can be particularly useful if you connect to cold only, as it still gives you the option of a warm wash occasionally. Check the maximum temperature recommended for the hot-water inlet. Many manufacturers recommend a lower temperature than most hot-water systems deliver — particularly solar hot-water systems. You may need a tempering valve to reduce the temperature.

Optional features

- **Out-of-balance correction** Automatically detects and redistributes an out-of-balance load, either by spinning slowly before the full spin cycle or by taking in more water (which is what most top loaders do). If you're concerned about high water usage, opt for a machine without this feature or go for a front loader.
- **Selectable spin speed** You can change the spin speed on some programs. A higher spin speed will result in dryer clothes, or you might want a lower speed for delicates or easily creased fabrics.
- **Auto-sensing water level** This can help you save water, energy and time by automatically adjusting the water level according to the load and/or fabric type. Some machines also adjust the wash action.
- **Water-saver option** Lets you use less water for rinsing or reuse sudsy water and/or rinse water. The FISHER & PAYKEL Aquasmart also has a 'front loader' mode that washes with significantly less water — this is the program we tested on.



All machines now have to have a label showing how water-efficient they are, but what you can't tell is to what degree rinse effectiveness has been compromised in using less water.

When you're shopping for your next washing machine you'll only be able to see from the label whether a machine is water-efficient, not whether it compromises rinse effectiveness to achieve this; you need CHOICE's tests for that.



profiles

Models in the What to buy list are profiled in rank order within groups. Full scores and important features are listed in the table on page 54.



Up to 5.5kg

MIELE Novotronic W502

Price: \$1699 **Size:** 5.5 kg

Front loader

This is the equal best overall performer of all tested machines and has very good dirt removal and water efficiency. Extra features include out-of-balance correction, auto-sensing water level, gentle/delicates wash, fast wash for smaller loads, woollens wash, hand wash and selectable spin speed. On the downside, it's relatively expensive.



BEST BUY

FISHER & PAYKEL MWS12

Price: \$749 **Size:** 5.5 kg

Top loader

A good overall performer with excellent rinse performance. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, woollens wash, out-of-balance correction, water-saver options and variable spin speed. However, like most top loaders it's not very gentle on clothes and also has a low water efficiency score.



FISHER & PAYKEL GW512

Price: \$859 **Size:** 5.5 kg

Top loader

This machine boasts excellent rinse performance. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, favourite wash, auto-sensing water level, woollens wash, out-of-balance correction, water-saver options and selectable spin speed. However, like most top loaders it's not very gentle on clothes, and also has a low water efficiency score.



BEST BUY

6-7 kg

BOSCH Maxx Lifestyle Exclusive WAE26470

Price: \$1499 **Size:** 7 kg

Front loader

This machine was the highest-scoring front loader in its size range, with very good water efficiency, and good scores for all the other rating criteria. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, woollens wash, extra rinse option, out-of-balance correction, auto-sensing water level, selectable spin speed and time-to-go display. While the HAIER HWM1260K front loader in this size range is a lot cheaper, the BOSCH's rinse performance is much better.



BEST BUY



FISHER & PAYKEL GW612**Price** \$995 **Size** 6.5 kg**Top loader**

This tied with the Intuitive Eco IW712 as best overall top loader in its size range, with excellent rinse performance and very good dirt removal, and it's slightly cheaper. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, favourite wash, woollens wash, water-saver options, auto-sensing water level, out-of-balance correction and selectable spin speed. The downsides are a low water efficiency score and a particularly low score for gentleness.

**BEST BUY****FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW712****Price** \$1149 **Size** 7 kg**Top loader**

Equal best overall top loader in its size range, with very good dirt removal and rinse performance. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, favourite wash, auto-sensing water level, woollens wash, out-of-balance correction, water-saver option, selectable spin speed and time-to-go display. However, it too has a particularly low score for gentleness and it has a low water efficiency score.

**BEST BUY****MIELE Honeycomb Care W1213****Price** \$2999 **Size** 6.5 kg

This model has been discontinued but should still be available in some shops

Front loader

The Honeycomb scored very well for water efficiency and offers a top-loader-like running time on a normal wash at full capacity. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash (small loads), auto-sensing water level, woollens wash, hand wash, variable spin speed, out-of-balance correction, time-to-go display. On the downside, this machine has a low rinse performance score and is the most expensive machine tested.

7.5 kg or larger**ELECTROLUX Ultra Silencer EWF1495****Price** \$1689 **Size** 8 kg**Front loader**

This is the equal best overall performer of all tested machines and boasts very good dirt removal, spin efficiency, rinse performance and water efficiency — the only machine on test that managed to combine the last two attributes. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, favourite wash,

woollens wash, hand wash, auto-sensing water level, extra rinse option, out-of-balance correction, water-saver options, selectable spin speed and time-to-go display. The only downside is its fairly high price tag. Despite its 'Ultra Silencer' name it isn't the quietest machine tested (that was the HAIER HWM90DD), but it's among the quieter models.

LG Inverter WD-1238C**Price** \$1249 **Size** 7.5 kg**Front loader**

This LG front loader is a good all-rounder, with very good water efficiency and good dirt-removing ability, gentleness and spin efficiency. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, auto-sensing water level, woollens wash, extra rinse option, out-of-balance correction, variable spin speed and time-to-go display. Its rinse performance score of 64% is on the low side, though far from the worst.

FISHER & PAYKEL Aquasmart WL80T65CW1**Price** \$1199 **Size** 8 kg**Top loader**

The best top loader in this size range, using front-loader-like quantities of water in its 'front loader' wash mode (the program we tested on) and yet still achieving very good dirt removal. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, favourite wash, auto-sensing water level, woollens wash, out-of-balance correction, variable spin speed and time-to-go display.

FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW812**Price** \$1179 **Size** 8 kg**Top loader**

Very good dirt removal and rinse performance are this top loader's leading attributes. Extra features include a gentle/delicates wash, fast wash, favourite wash, auto-sensing water level, woollens wash, out-of-balance correction, water-saver option, variable spin speed and time-to-go display. On the downside, it has a low water efficiency score.



PHOTOS: GENE ROSS

A major effect of washing in cold water is that machines use a lot less energy, as they don't have to heat the water (or your hot-water system doesn't have to do it for them). So energy efficiency is no longer considered in the overall score.

MODEL		PERFORMANCE								
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	Type	Overall score (%)	Dirt removal score (%)	Rinse performance score (%)	Gentleness score (%)	Spin efficiency score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Water used (L, 'normal' wash)	Cycle time (min, 'normal' wash)	Noise (dB)
Up to 5.5 kg										
Miele Novotronic W502	Front	80	84	76	75	75	82	51	117	64
Fisher & Paykel MW512	Top / agitator	72	79	90	53	69	52	132	44	69
Fisher & Paykel GW512	Top / agitator	71	77	90	52	69	53	131	45	67
6 kg to 7 kg										
Bosch Maxx Lifestyle Exclusive WAE26470	Front	76	73	76	79	76	80	69	72	67
Fisher & Paykel GW612	Top / agitator	73	83	91	48	69	52	157	47	69
Fisher & Paykel Intuitive Eco IW712	Top / agitator	73	83	89	45	70	56	154	52	62
Miele Honeycomb Care W1213	Front	73	73	59	78	78	83	54	43	62
Haier HWM1260K	Front	71	75	43	76	79	86	41	95	69
LG Fuzzy Logic Turbodrums WF-T656	Top / impeller	71	81	87	53	55	53	153	67	62
Westinghouse Complete Care LT6095A	Top / agitator	70	71	84	59	64	61	116	44	60
7.5 kg or larger										
Electrolux Ultra Silencer EWF1495	Front	80	82	80	75	81	82	73	108	60
LG Inverter WD-1238C	Front	76	78	64	78	75	82	67	87	63
Fisher & Paykel Aquasmart WL80T65CW1	Top / impeller	75	81	74	58	74	81	76	58	63
Fisher & Paykel Intuitive Eco IW812	Top / agitator	74	80	89	55	72	55	179	55	64
Samsung Silver Nano J1455AV	Front	73	80	43	74	79	86	54	131	71
Haier HWM90DD	Top / impeller	69	85	51	53	62	72	125	95	54
Simpson Eziset 522750L	Top / agitator	69	69	90	60	70	52	180	56	62
Simpson Eziset 522800L	Top / agitator	66	60	88	65	67	55	182	56	65



about the rest

The table gives a summary of performance scores, features and specifications for all tested models. For the models that didn't make it into the *What to buy* list, some considerations include:

- The **HAIER HWM1260K** is very water-efficient but got a low rinse performance score.
- The **WESTINGHOUSE Complete Care** and **LG Fuzzy Logic Turbodrums** got comparatively low scores for water and spin efficiency and are not very gentle on clothes.
- The **SAMSUNG Silver Nano** is also water-efficient but has a rinse performance score of only 43%.
- The **HAIER HWM90DD** is the top performer for dirt removal, but has low rinse performance and gentleness scores and also the annoying habit of returning to factory settings — a heavy-duty wash and intermediate spin speed — after each wash. Some people might like a default setting (though many might prefer a machine to stay at their last-used setting) but we'd think a normal wash and maximum spin speed would be a more useful default. On the positive side, it's the quietest machine tested.
- The **SIMPSON Eziset 522750L** and **Eziset 522800L** offer only a limited range of features, unlike most of the other machines, and also have low water efficiency scores.

USING THE TABLE

Scores All the scores are for a 'normal' cold wash program. The overall score is made up of:

- Dirt removal: 40%
- Rinse performance: 20%
- Gentleness: 15%
- Spin efficiency: 10%
- Water efficiency: 15%

Dirt removal The machine we use to measure this (a spectrophotometer) is more accurate than the human eye: differences of about 6% are visible.

Features See *What to look for*, page 51, for more on the ones in the table.

Running costs This is an estimate of how much it'll cost over 10 years

for water and electricity if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a 'normal' cycle, based on 15 cents per kWh for electricity and \$1 per 1000 L for water, and including any electricity used when the machine's connected to power but not in use.

Price Recommended or average retail, as of December 2006.

(A) Discontinued but may still be available in some shops.

FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS				COSTS	
cycle	Woolens cycle (machine / hand washable)	Out-of-balance correction	Selectable spin speed	Auto-sensing water level	Extra rinse	Water-saver option	Tap connection	Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)	Contact	Running costs (\$ / 10 years)	Price (\$)
	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓			C only	5.5	85 x 60 x 58	03 9764 7130 / www.miele.com.au	355	1699
	✓ / -	✓	✓			✓	H & C, C	5.5	105 x 56 x 56	1300 650 590 / www.fp.com.au	570	749
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓		✓	H & C, C	5.5	105 x 56 x 56	1300 650 590 / www.fp.com.au	554	859
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	7	86 x 60 x 59	1300 368 339 / www.boschappliances.com.au	368	1499
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓		✓	H & C, C	6.5	105 x 60 x 60	1300 650 590 / www.fp.com.au	674	995
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓		✓	H & C, C	7	105 x 60 x 60	1300 650 590 / www.fp.com.au	673	1149
	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C, C	6.5	85 x 60 x 72	03 9764 7130 / www.miele.com.au	308	2999
	✓ / -		✓		✓		H & C	6	85 x 60 x 57	1300 729 948 / www.haier.com.au	229	749
	✓ / -			✓			H & C	6.5	93 x 59 x 61	1800 725 375 / www.lge.com.au	659	936
	✓ / -		✓			✓	H & C	6	102 x 60 x 64	1300 363 640 / www.westinghouse.com.au	503	799
	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	8	85 x 60 x 60	1300 363 640 / www.electrolux.com.au	417	1689
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C	7.5	85 x 60 x 55	1800 725 375 / www.lge.com.au	467	1249
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓		✓	H & C	8	105 x 65 x 65	1300 650 590 / www.fp.com.au	385	1199
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓		✓	H & C, C	8	105 x 65 x 65	1300 650 590 / www.fp.com.au	758	1179
	✓ / -	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	7.5	85 x 60 x 60	1300 362 603 / www.samsung.com.au	364	1199
	- / -	✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C	9	108 x 69 x 69	1300 729 948 / www.haier.com.au	632	1499
	✓ / -						H & C, C	7.5	108 x 70 x 73	1300 363 640 / www.simpson.com.au	748	899
	✓ / -					✓	H & C, C	8	108 x 70 x 73	1300 363 640 / www.simpson.com.au	749	949

How reliable have subscribers found them?

In our latest reliability survey, subscribers told us whether their washing machine (bought in or after 1996) had needed repairing in the previous 12 months. Washing machines were one of the more unreliable appliances, with 15% needing repair, and front loaders were slightly more likely to need it than top loaders. The most commonly reported problem was the machine going out of balance.

Differences of 8% or more between brands are meaningful. The numbers in brackets are the number of responses we received for each brand.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

ALL WASHING MACHINES	85
MIELE (330)	94
HITACHI (188)	91
BOSCH (191)	88
LG (616)	88
SIMPSON (1092)	88
MAYTAG (306)	87
HOOVER (1255)	86
WESTINGHOUSE (176)	86
FISHER & PAYKEL (2894)	85
WHIRLPOOL (957)	85
KLEENMAID (320)	80
ASKO (442)	78
ARISTON (158)	73
BENDIX (139)	64

The super secret



Nick Coates,
Senior Finance Policy Officer

Are you one of millions of Australians with more than one superannuation account? The problem of multiple super accounts is burning a big hole in our pockets and eroding our retirement savings.

Poor service from super funds and unnecessary red tape on account transfers make it very difficult for consumers to amalgamate accounts. That means we pay more than \$1 billion in unnecessary fees each year on second and third super accounts

we don't need. The CHOICE report *The Super Secret* found that:

- There are more than 28 million superannuation accounts in Australia, at least 13 million more than are needed.
- An individual consumer on an average wage can lose tens of thousands of dollars in retirement income as a result of multiple accounts.
- The current system promotes multiple accounts and makes it too hard for consumers to consolidate them — so we can expect continued growth in account numbers unless changes are made.
- The super industry benefits at consumers' expense, although a lot of the lost millions goes in unnecessary administration rather than fund profits.

Our report makes several recommendations for action by the super industry and government. They're designed to reduce the number of existing accounts and make it far simpler to consolidate them. For a copy of the super report, go to choice.com.au/superaccounts.

If you have multiple super accounts, here are a few steps to help you consolidate them:

- Track down your old super. If you're not sure where it is, go to choice.com.au and search for 'free money'.
- Before filling in any transfer forms, check the fees, costs and any potential loss of benefits of closing old super accounts and transferring the money to a different fund. Most people will benefit from consolidating their super. But there will be cases, particularly with defined-benefit funds and corporate master trusts, where it's worth keeping the old account open. Carefully check the benefits you maybe losing. For example, your employer may pay your fees in a corporate master trust.
- Choose the fund you want to consolidate your super into. Compare fees, investment choice, services and returns (but remember good returns in the past don't guarantee them in the future).
- Contact the fund you want to consolidate old super into. Find out what you have to do to transfer benefits into it.
- Contact the fund(s) you want to withdraw the money from. You'll have to complete some transfer forms and will probably need proof of identification. ■

CHEWING GUM: the new healthfood?

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is considering allowing calcium to be added to sugar-free chewing gum, following an application from the Wrigley Company. Wrigley suggests it would provide gum chewers with an alternative source of dietary calcium, claiming that chewing calcium-fortified gum will be beneficial for teeth and bones.

CHOICE doesn't support this application:

- Chewing gum isn't an appropriate product to be promoted as a source of calcium because we don't swallow and digest it like a food or drink.

- Five pieces of gum would provide an adult with only 12.5% of their average recommended dietary intake of calcium. We doubt if most people would chew that much in one day, so despite the inevitable labelling claims

the gum isn't going to be a major source of dietary calcium.

- If you chewed five pieces of sugar-free gum a day you'd increase your consumption of artificial sweeteners, which can have a laxative effect.
- Wrigley doesn't provide enough evidence that we'd absorb the calcium in chewing gum as well as we absorb calcium from foods we eat and digest. We also don't know how long we'd need to chew the gum to absorb all the calcium or how much calcium remains in the unswallowed gum.

This application perfectly illustrates the problem with the current voluntary process for 'fortifying' foods with vitamins or minerals. Ideally, health authorities should determine which foods should be fortified in order to deliver specific nutrients to those who need more. Instead, the current FSANZ process lets manufacturers decide which foods they want to fortify and apply to have the Food Standards Code amended accordingly. Voluntary fortification is more successful at promoting industry innovation than addressing real nutrient deficiencies in some people's diets.



RECALLS & bans

INFANT FORMULA Nestlé Australia has recalled **NAN 2 H.A. Gold Infant Formula**, a 900 g white can with plastic lid, with expiry dates of 05.02.2008 and 07.02.2008.

The problem It may contain metal pieces.

What to do Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 152 126 between 8 am and 6 pm AEDST.

FOOD Winho Trading has recalled **Elegant Flower Preserved Bean Curd**, 350 g glass bottle, with a use-by date of 30/12/07, sold in NSW.

The problem Tests have indicated microbial contamination.

What to do Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 02 9725 7888.

FOOD Bi-Lo and Coles Supermarkets have recalled **Bi-Lo Frozen Turkey Thigh Roast Roll**, 2 kg, all best-before dates up to and including 14 September 2008, with an APN of 9310645524665. It was sold in Bi-Lo stores in the ACT, NSW, NT, Queensland, SA and Victoria, and in Bi-Lo stores that were recently converted to Coles stores in NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria.

The problem Incorrect cooking instructions on the product packaging could lead to a safety risk.

What to do The product can be rendered safe by removing the plastic packaging prior to cooking, but customers are encouraged to return it to any Coles or Bi-Lo store for a refund. For more information call 1800 061 562.

FOOD MasterFoods has recalled **MasterFoods Garlic Powder**, 155 g, best-before date 07/09/2008.

The problem It may contain soy protein, which is undeclared on the packaging.

What to do Don't eat it if you have an allergy to soy protein. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 816 016.

FOOD Sydney Nut and Sweet Company has recalled **Sydney Nut and Sweet Company rice crackers**, 50 g, 150 g, 300 g and 500 g, all in a printed plastic bag, a 1 kg carton or a 100 g clear plastic bag, with best-before dates of 06/07, 07/07, sold in NSW.

The problem They contain peanuts and a sesame coating, which is undeclared on the packaging.

What to do Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

NIGHT LIGHT Australian Discount Retail has recalled **Night Light Cartoon and Auto Work Light Wand**. The Night Light Cartoon, model B15 (a cat, dog, mouse or elephant), has an APN of 9316292244871 and was sold between February and October 2006. The Auto Work Light Wand, 19 LEDs, APN 9316292310279, was sold between May and November 2006. Both products were available at The Warehouse, Go-Lo, Crazy Clark's, Makro and Looksharp Concepts.

The problem They may overheat, posing a fire hazard.

What to do Don't use them. Return them to any of the above stores for a refund, or for more information call 1800 254 687, or email merchandise.compliance@adrt.com.au.

NIGHT LIGHT Test Right International has recalled **ACME Night Light**, model number NL-3, sold in Woolworths supermarkets since December 2004. It's fitted with black insulated pins and marked with a C tick N443 along with CS4432N.

The problem The electrical pins may remain in the power socket when the light is removed.

What to do Switch the power socket off and carefully remove the night light. Don't touch a pin if it stays in the socket — phone 1800 501 735 for further advice. Return it to any Woolworths store for a refund.

CHRISTMAS DECORATION Dats has recalled **Christmas Magic 10 m rope light**, and **Christmas Magic 10 m rope light with eight-function controller**. They have a reference number of either 15954 or 15956, which can be found on the white tag on the black cord. They were sold in The Warehouse Group, Makro, Clints Warehouse and Chickenfeds stores between 1 September 2006 and 30 November 2006.

The problem There is exposed and uninsulated wiring in the product.

What to do Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 02 8881 4840.

CANDLE HOLDERS Kmart has recalled **Santa's Christmas Wonderland Table Top Candle Holder** with three glass tealights, APN 9300800516697;

Santa's Christmas Wonderland 35 cm Lamp Post Candle in gold or silver, APN 9300800655778; **Santa's Christmas Wonderland Single Candle Holder Metal Style** with Decorative trimming, APN 9300800579562; **Santa's Christmas Wonderland Candle Holder set** in PVC box, APN 9300800579623; and **Santa's Christmas Wonderland 30 cm Metal Candle Holder** and three candles, APN 9300800373160. The APN can be found on the tag attached to the product. The affected products have green trimming with either red or gold flower petals and may or may not have gold cones.

The problem The trimming may ignite when the candle is lit.

What to do Don't light the candle. Return it to Kmart for a refund, or for more information call 1800 634 251.

DOG LEASH Austwide Wholesalers has recalled **Woofax 3 m retractable dog leash**, item code PA0087B, barcode 9316341 and 217856.

The problem An 18-month supply ban has been placed on this product by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, due to the clasp failing and potentially resulting in injury (see CHOICE, December 2006, page 15, for more on this).

What to do Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 08 9455 3200.

HEATER GAF Control has recalled the following convection heaters: **Sunair CVS2000**, **Sunair CVS2000F**, **Sunair CVS2000T**, **Heller CVS2000F**, **Radi-ITCVS2000F** and **Modern Living MLCVS2000F**. They were sold between April 2005 and October 2006.

The problem A mechanical fault may lead to a fire hazard.

What to do Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1300 659 469.

TOY MJM Australia Imports has recalled **Dora the Explorer** (APN 5050841038217) and **Disney Fairies** (APN 9317762109980) **Clock Puzzle**, sold in Kmart, Target and by some direct marketing companies.

The problem They pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do Remove it from the reach of young children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

TOY All Brands Toys & Collectibles has recalled **Ninja Mask set**. It's on a blister card 520 mm by 25 mm with the wording 'The Detective' and comprises a dagger, mask, figurine and mini crossbow with three suction arrows. It has a product code of A4032 and sold for \$4.85 in NSW and Queensland.

The problem It doesn't comply with mandatory requirements of the Australian toy standard.

What to do Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 07 5593 6100.

TOY All Brands Toys & Collectibles has recalled **Power Trucks** in three styles: **Dump truck**, **Loader** and **Road Roller**. They're approximately 25 cm in length and didn't come in a box.

The problem Small parts pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do Remove it from the reach of children and return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 07 5593 6100.

TOY Cebas has recalled **IKEA wooden toy train pieces**, given away in the **IKEA Adelaide** store restaurant, and sold in the **IKEA Adelaide** store since the beginning of July 2006.

The problem The pieces pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do Remove them from the reach of young children. If possible, return them to the Adelaide store's Exchange and Returns department, in exchange for a soft toy and ice cream voucher. If you're not able to return them in person, a postage-paid bag will be sent to you so it can be posted back to the store. For more information call 08 8154 4532, 1300 882 554 or email info@adl.IKEA.com.au. ■

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The Australian Consumers' Association is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. ACN 000 281 925 ABN27 000 281 925.

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HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

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Digital cameras **Apr, Oct**
Digital music players **Apr, Jun*, Mar**
Digital TV explained **Dec**
Dishwasher detergents **Jan/Feb**
Dishwashers **Jul, Oct*, Jan/Feb**
Dog leashes, retractable **Dec**
Drugs, prescription prices **Dec**
Dryers, clothes **Aug**
Dummy safety **Jul**
DVD/hard disc recorders **May, Jun*, Jul*, Nov**
DVD players, portable **Oct**

Eligible rollover funds **Aug**
Espresso machines **Mar**
Exercise equipment, crosstrainers **Jan/Feb**

Family tree software **Jan/Feb**
First aid, natural treatments **Mar**
Fluoride in water **Mar**
Food **Oct**
10 fat foods **Jan/Feb**
bread **Sep**
cereal bars **Oct**
chocolates **Dec**
food at sports venues **Aug**
free-range meat **Mar**
'fresh' fruit and vegetables 'healthfood' in supermarkets **Aug**
iced tea **May**
meat pies **Nov**
orange juice **May**
pasta sauces **Jun**
pesticides in fruit and veg **Jun**
probiotics **Jul**
promotions to kids **Jul**
protein bars **Jul**
salt **Apr**
Food processors **Nov**
Free-range meat **Mar**
Fridges, mixed sizes **May, Nov**
Fruit, 'fresh' **Aug**

Gadgets, useless **Jan/Feb**
Garden solar-powered lights **Aug**
Gas barbecues **Dec, Mar***
Genealogy software **Jan/Feb**
Glass cleaners **Oct**
GP, choosing one **Jan/Feb**
GPS car navigation systems **Jul, Jan/Feb**
Grass trimmers **Sep**
Graters **Mar**
'Green' cars **Sep**
'Green' multipurpose cleaners **Apr**

Hair shampoo **Jul**
Health **Apr**
anti-snoring products **Apr**
bulk-billing **Jan/Feb**
childhood obesity **Oct**
choosing a GP **Jan/Feb**
fluoride in water **Mar**
hearing aids **Jul**
natural first-aid treatments **Mar**
prescription prices **Dec**
wheatgrass juice **May**
Health insurance, gap **Sep**
Healthcare system, how to save money **Sep**
'Healthfood' in supermarkets **May**
Hearing aids **Jul**

Heaters **Jun**
column water **Sep**
Home theatre systems **Jan/Feb**
House-minding organisations **Oct**

Iced tea **Nov**
Inkjet printers **Nov**
Insulation **May**
Irons, steam **Jun**

Kettles **Oct**
Kitchen benchtop materials **Aug**

Laptop computers **Jun**
Lawn trimmers **Sep**
Lawnmowers, petrol, mulch/catch **Nov**
LCD TVs, 81 cm **Aug, Sep***

Mascara **Jan/Feb**
Meat, free-range **Mar**
Meat pies **May**
Media merging **Aug**
Microwave ovens **Jun**
Mobile phones **Jun**
GSM repairs **Jan/Feb**
MP3 players **Apr, Jun*, Mar**
speaker docks **Sep**
Music, digital **Apr, Jun*, Mar**

Nail salons **Sep**
Nannies, finding one **May**
Natural first-aid treatments **Jul**
Negative gearing **Mar**
Notebook computers **Jun**
Nursing homes **Sep**

Obesity in children **Oct**
Orange juice **Jun**
Ovens, microwave **Jun**

Paper shredders **Mar**
Pasta sauces **Jun**
Personal trainer, finding a good one **Apr**
Personal video recorders (PVR)/set-top boxes **Jun**
Pesticides in fruit and veg **Apr**
Phones, cordless **Jan/Feb**
mobile — see Mobile phones **May**
Pies, meat **Dec, Jan/Feb***
Plasma TVs, 106 cm **Oct**
Portable DVD players **Dec**
Prescription prices **Nov**
Printers, inkjet **Jul**
Probiotics **Jul**
Protein bars **Jul**

Refrigerators — see Fridges **Dec**
Retractable dog leashes **Dec**
Reverse mortgages **Mar**

Salt **Apr**
Sandwich (panini) presses **May, Jul***
Scams **Jul**
Secateurs **Jun**
Set-top boxes/PVR **Jun**
Shampoo **Jun**
Shonkys, The **Nov**
Showerheads, water-efficient **Mar**
Shredders, paper **Mar**
Silicone bakeware **Apr**
Smoke alarms **Jun**
Snoring, anti-snoring products **Apr**
Solar-powered garden lights **Aug**
Sparkling wine and champagne **Dec, Jan/Feb***

Speaker docks for iPods/MP3 players **Sep**
Store finance options **Dec**
Strollers **Aug**
double layback **May, Aug***
Suitcases, wheeled **May**
Super, eligible rollover funds **Aug**

Tanning, DIY **Nov**
Tea, iced **Nov**
Telephones — see Phones **Nov**
Television **Dec**
digital TV explained **Aug, Sep***
LCD, 81 cm **Dec, Jan/Feb***
plasma, 106 cm **Jun**
set-top boxes/PVR **Jun**

USB keys **Apr**
Useless gadgets **Jan/Feb**

Vacuum cleaners **Nov**
Vegetables, 'fresh' **Aug**
Video equipment **Dec**
camcorders **Dec**
DVD/hard disc recorders **May, Jun*, Jul*, Nov**
portable DVD players **Oct**
PVR/set-top boxes **Jun**

Washing machines **Sep, Mar**
Water-efficient showerheads **Mar**
Water heaters **Sep**
Water safety products for children **Dec**
Web cameras **Dec**
Wedding dress, buying **Jan/Feb**
Wheatgrass juice **May**
Window cleaners **Oct**
Wine, sparkling **Dec, Jan/Feb***

